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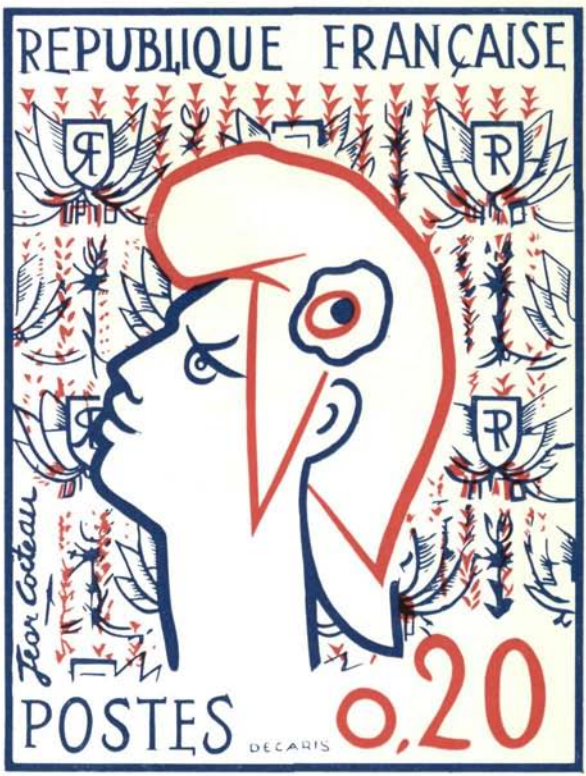

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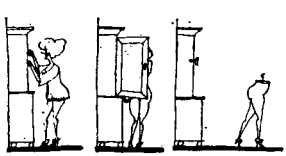

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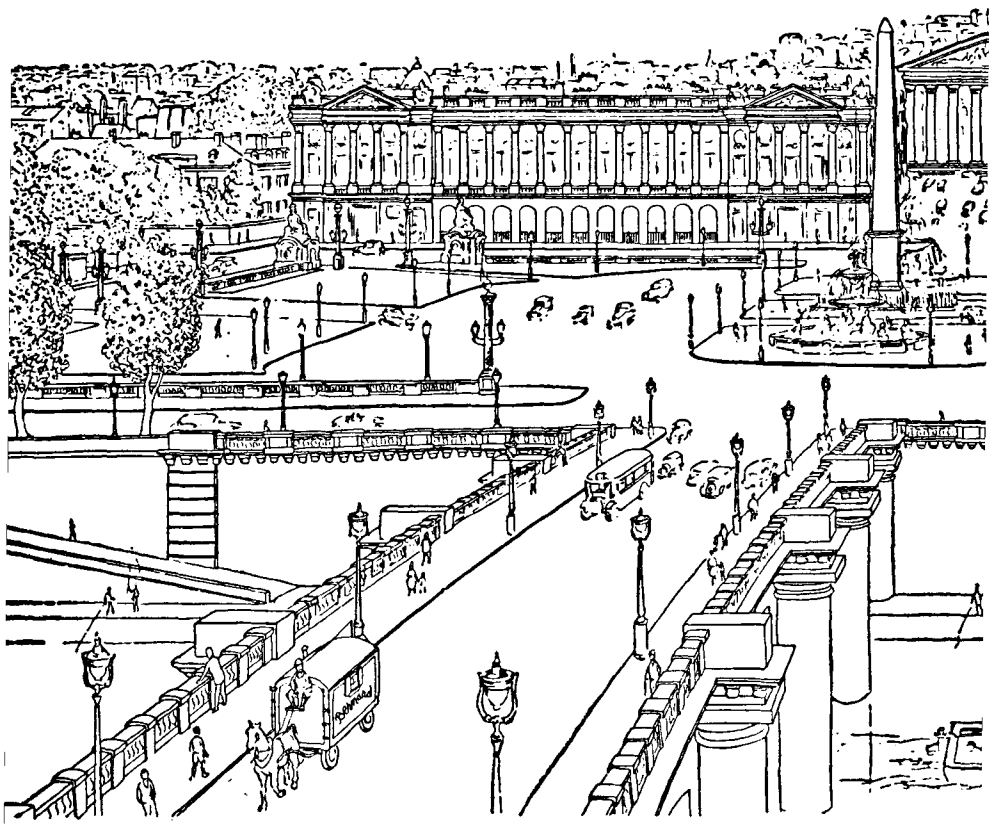

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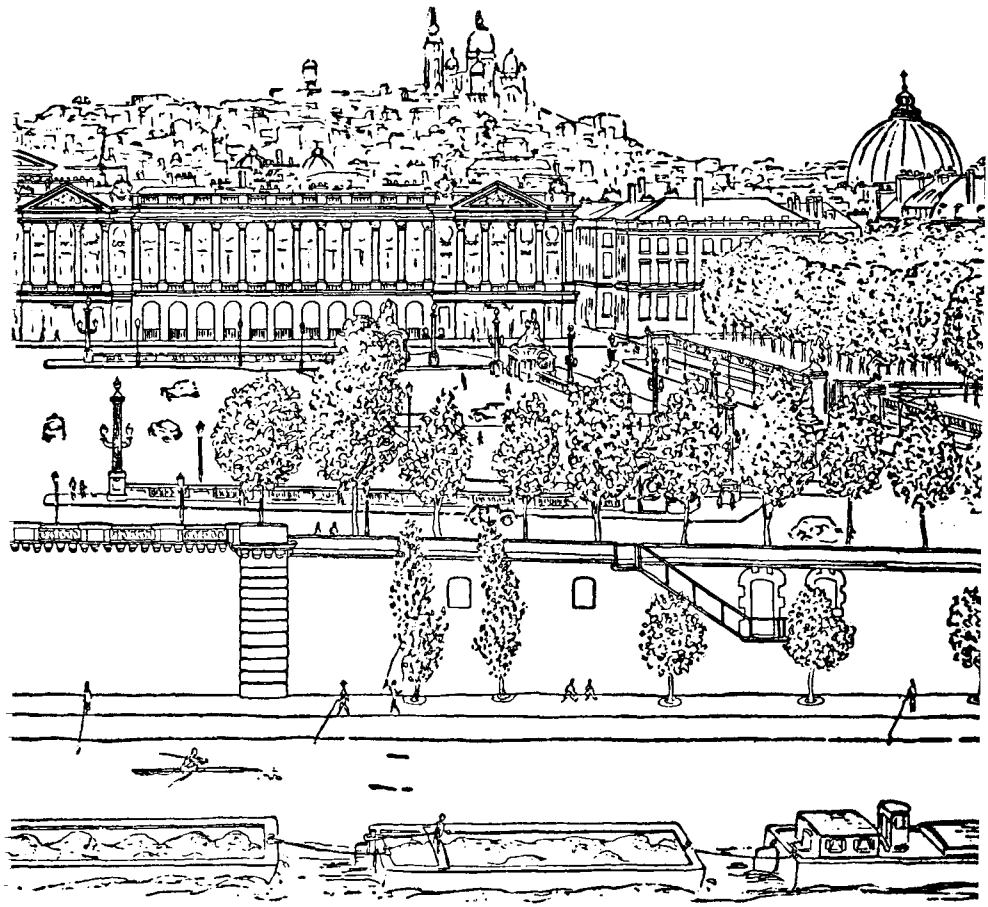

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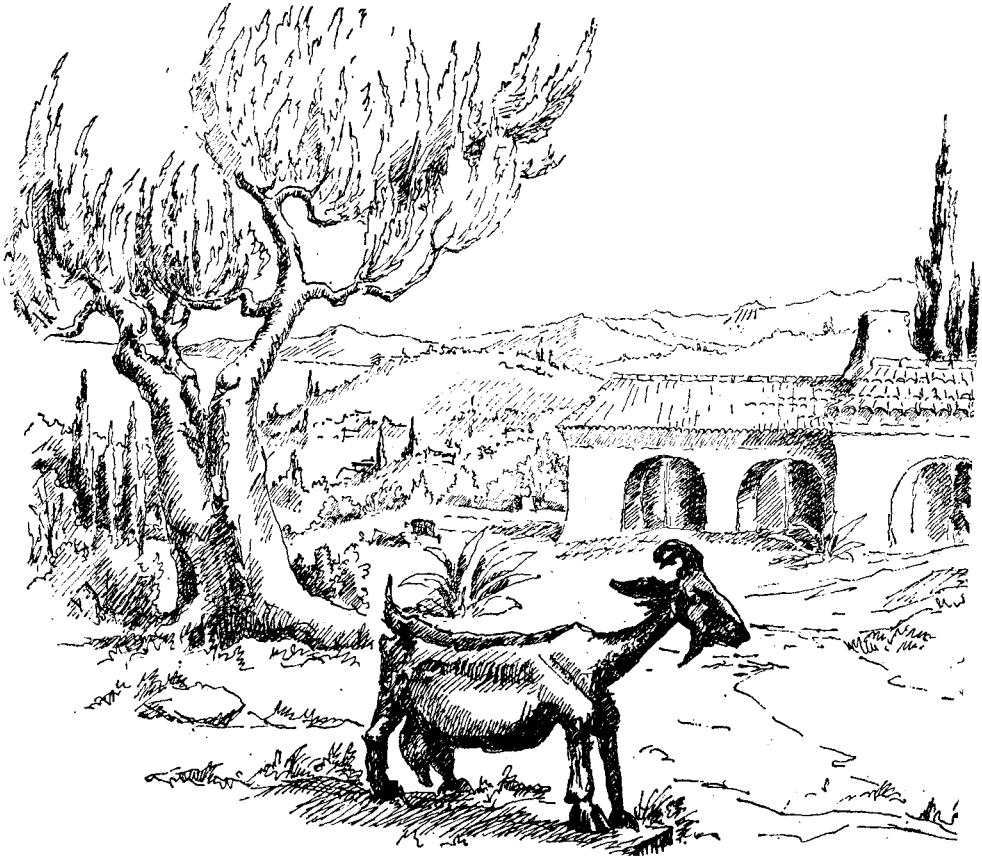

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Borgia, et dont le peintre maudit, Van Gogh a
fait, furent les premiers martyrs.
Malheur au jeune peintre dont la force s'exprima
par un charme et qui devra subir la malédiction
~~[illegible]~~ de plaire à ceux
qui aiment qu'il importe de déplaire et
qui jouent la modernité jusqu'à suspecter ce
qui leur plaît.
Mais la musique les choses ne suivent point
la même pente. La musique est souriante.
Elle ~~[illegible]~~ j'imite j'aime par des pentes qu'on
n'ajouterait pas. Elle traverse, semble-t-il, des
cloisons étanches et je me demande si des
farouches adeptes du jazz ~~[illegible]~~ guettant
d'une oreille ~~[illegible]~~ la moindre ~~[illegible]~~ note qui
trahirait la cause, s'ils tendaient ~~[illegible]~~ les règles et
cherchaient les routes du cœur, je me
demande, dis-je, si certains prêtres du culte
ne haïssent pas eux-mêmes et ne de

Jean Cocteau: a manuscript page

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THE ART OF FICTION XXXIV

JEAN COCTEAU

AN INTERVIEW

A collector had a house full of horrible things. "Do you like these?" *Cocteau finally asked. "No. But my parents missed the chance of buying the Impressionists cheap because they didn't like them. I buy only what I don't like."—A young Netherlander, said Cocteau, was the first to buy the Impressionists and bring them home. Locked in an insane asylum for 15 years, he died there. In his trunk were found some of the masterpieces of Impressionism, which had by then acquired considerable value. His parents went to the head of the asylum and accused him of having kept a sane man incarcerated.*

Cocteau's vivacity of intelligence caused him to live in a world of accelerated images, as if a film were run in fast motion. One

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thinks of a different time stage as a real possibility: differing human beings apparently all on the same physical ground living actually at different accelerations. In Cocteau's case, there was no doubt that a rapidity of intelligence accounted for the multiplication, juxtaposition, proliferation and mixing of experience and its exterior face, behavior—as well as for what was often called a certain superficiality or légèreté. *"He who sees further renders less of what he sees, however much he renders."*

First met on the set of Le Testament d'Orphée *in 1959 among the lime rocks, tortured as they are into Cocteauan shapes by the wind, at Les Baux in Provence—significantly on the day he filmed the death of the poet, himself—Cocteau treated the interviewer to a glimpse into a life that bridges two epochs (Proust and Rostand, to Picasso and Stravinsky). He chatted with eminent grace between takes; then went over to stretch out again (upon a tarpaulin laid down out of camera range) on the floor of the quarried-out cavern in rock, lit up eerily by the floodlights, to be the transpierced poet—a spear through his breast (actually built around his breast under his jacket on an iron hoop). The hands gripped the spear; the talc-white face from the age of Diderot became anguished.*

The taped interview took place in the Riviera villa of Mme. Alec Weisweiller a few months before Cocteau's death in the fall of 1963. The villa entrance was framed by facsimiles of two great Etruscan masks from his staging of his Oedipus-Rex*—a kind of static opera in scenes which he wrote after music by Stravinsky—masks worked in mosaic into the cement walk that winds through gardenia bushes and lilies to the portal out on the point of Cap Ferrat. You saw the schooner-form yacht of Niarchos out on the water toward Villefranche, where Cocteau lived in the Hotel Welcome in 1925 with Christian Bérard and wrote "Orpheus"; the poet was framed by his own tapestry of Judith and Holofernes which covers the whole of one of Mme. Weisweiller's dining terrace walls, and provokes strange reminiscences of the slumbering Roman soldiery in the "Resurrection" of Piero della Francesca. Lunch was preceded by a cocktail, mixed by the famous hands, which Cocteau said he had learned to make from a novel by Peter Cheyney..." white rum, curaçao, and some other things..." Lunch finished, the recorder was plugged in.*

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COCTEAU

After you have written a thing and you reread it, there is always the temptation to fix it up, to improve it, to remove its poison, blunt its sting. No—a writer prefers, usually, in his work the *resemblances*—how it accords with that he has read. His originality—himself—is not *there*, of course.

INTERVIEWER

When I brought forward your resemblance to Voltaire at lunch you were—I had better say "highly displeased." But you share Voltaire's rapidity of thought.

COCTEAU

I am very French—like him. Very, very French.

INTERVIEWER

My thought was Voltaire isn't as dry-sharp as is supposed: that this is a miscalculation owing to imputing to him what would be a thought-out hypercleverness in a more lethargic mind. But in fact Voltaire wrote very fast—"Candide" in three days. That holocaust of sparks was simply thrown off. Whether or not this is true of Voltaire, it is certainly true of you.

COCTEAU

Tiens! I am the antipode of Voltaire! He is all thought—intellect. I am nothing—"another" speaks in me. This force takes the *form* of intelligence, and this is my tragedy—and it always has been from the beginning.

INTERVIEWER

It takes us rather far to think you are *victimized* by intelligence, especially since for a half century you have been thought of as one of the keenest critical and critical-poetical intelligences in France; but doesn't this bear on something you told me about yourself and Proust—that you both got started wrong?

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COCTEAU

We both came out of the dandyism of the end of the nineteenth century. I turned my vest, eventually, toward 1912, but in the proper sense—in the right direction. Yet I am afraid the taint has persisted even to today. I suppressed all my earlier books of poems—from before 1913—and they are not in my collected works. Though I suppose that, after all, something from that epoch has always...

Marcel combatted those things in his own way. He would circle among his victims collecting his "black honey" his *miel noir*—he asked me once—"I beg of you, Jean, since you live in the rue d'Anjou in the same building with Mme. de Chevigné, of whom I've made the Duchess de Guermantes; I entreat you to get her to read my book. She won't read me; and she says she stubs her foot in my sentences. I beg you—" I told him that was as if he asked an ant to read Fabre. You don't ask an insect to read entomology.

INTERVIEWER

Strictly statistically, you were born in 1889. How could it have happened that you entered into this child protégé phase, so very like Voltaire, taken up by all Paris? Did you have some roots in the arts—in your family, for example?

COCTEAU

No. We lived at Maisons-Laffitte a few miles outside Paris; played tennis at this house and that, and were divided into two camps over the Dreyfus Affair. My father painted a little, an amateur—my grandfather had collected Stradivariuses and some excellent paintings.

INTERVIEWER

Excuse me. Do you think the loss of your father in your first year bears on your accomplishment? There is a whole theory that genius is only-childism and you were brought up by women, by your mother. An exceedingly beautiful one, from her pictures.

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COCTEAU

I can only reply to that that I have never felt any connection with my family. There is—I must say simply—something in me that is not in my family. That was not visible in my father or mother. I do not know its origin.

INTERVIEWER

What happened in those days after you were launched?

COCTEAU

I had met Edouard de Max, the theatre manager and actor, and Sarah Bernhardt, and others then called the "sacred monsters" of Paris, and in 1908 de Max and Sarah Bernhardt hired the Fémina Theatre in the Champs-Élysées for an evening of reading of my poems.

INTERVIEWER

How old were you then?

COCTEAU

Seventeen. It was the fourth of April, 1908. I became eighteen three months later. I then came to know Proust, the Countess de Noailles, the Rostands... the next year, with Maurice Rostand, I became director of the deluxe magazine Schéhérazade.

INTERVIEWER

Sarah Bernhardt. Edmond—the Rostand who wrote "Cyrano". It seems like another century. Then?

COCTEAU

I was on a slope that led straight toward the French Academy (where, incidentally, I have finally arrived; but for inverse reasons); and then, at about that time, I met Gide. I was pleasing myself by tracing arabesques; I took my youth for audacity, and mistook witticism for profundity. But something from Gide, not very clearly then, made me ashamed.

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INTERVIEWER

I recall something particularly scintillating you wrote in your first novel, *Potamak*, begun in 1914 though I think you didn't finish and publish it until after the war—which must have been ironically autobiographical of that stage.

COCTEAU

Yes, "Potomak" was published in 1919 and 1924.

INTERVIEWER

You wrote something to the effect of: a chameleon has a master who places it on a Scotch plaid. It is first frenzied, and then dies of fatigue.

COCTEAU

C'était malheureusement comme ça! Yes... I thought literature gay and amusing. But the Ballet Russe had come to Paris; had had to leave Russia, I believe. There are these strange conjunctures. I often wonder if much would have eventuated if Diaghilev had not come to Paris. He would say—"I do not like Paris. But if it were not for Paris I believe I would not be staged." Everything began, finally, you see, with Stravinsky's *Sacre*. The *Sacre du Printemps* reversed everything. Suddenly, we saw that art was a terrible *sacerdoce*—the Muses could have frightful aspects, as if they were she-devils. One had to enter into art as one went into monastic orders; little it mattered if one pleased or not, the point wasn't in that. Ha!—Nijinsky. He was a simple, you know; not in the least intelligent, and rather stupid. His body knew; his limbs had the intelligence. He, too, was infected by something happening then—when was it? It must have been in the May or April of 1913. Nijinsky was taller than the ordinary, with a mongol monkey face, and blunted fingers that looked like they'd been cut off short; it seemed unbelievable he was the idol of the public. When he invented his famous leap—in *Le Spectre de la Rose*—and sailed off the scene—Dimitri, his valet, would spew water from his lips into his face, and they would engulf him in hot towels. Poor fellow, he could not comprehend when the

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public hissed the choregraphy of *Sacre du Printemps* when he had himself—poor devil—seen they applauded *Le Spectre de la Rose*. Yet he was—manikin of a total professional deformation that he was—caught in the strange thing that was happening. Put the foot *there*; simply because it had always been put somewhere else before. I recall the night after the première of *Sacre*—Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Stravinsky and I went for a drive in a fiacre in the Bois de Boulogne, and that was when the first idea of *Parade* was born.

INTERVIEWER

But it wasn't presented then?

COCTEAU

A year or two later, listening to music of Satie, it took further form in my mind. Then, in 1917, to Satie's music, Léonide Massine, who did the choregraphy, I who wrote it, Diaghilev, and Picasso—in Rome—worked it out.

INTERVIEWER

Picasso?

COCTEAU

I had induced him to try set designs; he did the stage settings: the house fronts of Paris, a Sunday. It was put on by the Ballet Russe in Paris; and we were hissed and hooted. Fortunately, Apollinaire was back from the front and in uniform, and it was 1917, and so he saved Picasso and me from the crowd, or I am afraid we might have been hurt. It was new, you see; not what was expected...

INTERVIEWER

Aren't you really positing a kind of passion of anti-conformism in the ferment of those days?

COCTEAU

Yes. That's right. It was Satie who said, later, the great thing is not to refuse the Legion of Honor—the great thing is

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not to have deserved it. Everything was turning about. All the old traditional order was reversing. Satie said Ravel may have refused the Legion of Honor but that all his work accepted it! If you receive academic honors you must do so with lowered head—as punishment. You have disclosed yourself; you have committed a *fault*.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think this liberty can go too far?

COCTEAU

There is a total rupture between the artist and public since about 1914. But it will cause its opposite, of necessity, and there will be a new conformism. The new great painter will be a figurative—but with something mysterious. Undoubtedly, Marcel—Proust—was stronger because he hid his crimes (and he *lived* those crimes) behind an apparent classicism, not saying—"I am a nasty man of bad habits and I am going frankly to recount them to you."

INTERVIEWER

You make me think of Hemingway, in that. His whole School...

COCTEAU

He told me a very interesting thing. He said: "France is impossible. The people are impossible. But you have luck. In America a writer is considered a trained seal, a clown. But you respect artists so much here that when you said 'careful; Genêt is a genius'—when you said Genêt is a great writer he wasn't condemned; the judges took fright and let him off." And it is true, the thing Hemingway said. The French are inattentive and the worst public in the world—yet the artist is still respected. In America the theatre audiences are very respectful, I am afraid.

INTERVIEWER

Who would you name as fundamental to this conversion?

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COCTEAU

Oh—Satie, Stravinsky, Picasso.

INTERVIEWER

If you had to name the chief architect of this revolt?

COCTEAU

Oh—for me—Stravinsky. But you see I met Picasso only in 1916. And of course he had painted the *Demoiselles d' Avignon* nearly a decade before. And Satie was a great innovator. I can tell you something about him that will perhaps seem only amusing. But it is very significant. He had died, and we all went to his apartment, and under his blotter on his desk we all found our letters to him—unopened.

INTERVIEWER

Some moments ago, you spoke of this "other". I think we would do well to try to pin down what you mean by that. Picasso has spoken of it—said it is the real doer of his creation —and you have during our earlier talks. How would you define it?

COCTEAU

I feel myself inhabited by a force or being—very little known to me. *It gives* the orders; I follow. The conception of my novel *Les Enfants Terribles* came to me from a friend, from what he told me of a circle: a family closed from societal life. I commenced to write: exactly seventeen pages per day. It went well. I was pleased with it. Very. There was in the original life story some connection with America, and I had something I wanted to say about America. Poof! The being in me did not want to write that! Dead halt. A month of stupid staring at paper unable to say *any*thing. One day it commenced again in its own way.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mean the unconscious creates?

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COCTEAU

I long said art is a marriage of the conscious and the unconscious. Latterly, I have begun to think: is genius an at present undiscovered form of the memory?

INTERVIEWER

Now bearing on that, you once wrote a long time ago that the idea is born of the sentence as the dream of the positions of the dreamer. And Picasso says a creation has to be an accident or fault or misstep, for otherwise it has to come out of conscious experience, which is observed from what pre-exists. And you've averred: the poet doesn't invent, he listens.

COCTEAU

Yes, but it may be much more complex than that. There's Satie, who didn't want to receive outside messages. And to *what* do we listen?

INTERVIEWER

Simply banally, how do you manage such things as names of characters?

COCTEAU

Dargelos, of course, was a real person. He is the one who throws the fatal snowball in "The Blood Of A Poet"; again the same, a snowball, in my novel *Les Enfants Terribles*, which Rosamond Lehmann has translated (with obsessive difficulty, she wrote me); and this time, also, the black globule of poison—sent Paul to provoke his suicide. I found I had to use the name of the actual person, with whom I was in school. The name is mythical, but somehow it had to remain that of the lad. There are strange things that enter into these origins. Radiguet said to me: "In three days, I am going to be shot by the soldiers of God." And three days later he died. There was that, too. The name of the Angel Heurtebise, in the book of poems *L'Ange Heurtebise* which was written in an unbroken automatism from start to finish, was taken from the name of an elevator stop where I happened to pause once.

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And I have named characters after designations on those great old-fashioned glass jars in a pharmacy in Normandy.

INTERVIEWER

What about the mechanism of translation? I think you once wrote in German?

COCTEAU

I had a German nurse. Apart from a few dozen words of yours, it is the only language I know aside from French. But my vocabulary was very limited. From this handicap I extracted obstacle—difficulty which I thought I could use to advantage, and I wrote some poems in German. But that is another matter and touches on the whole question of the necessity of obstacle.

INTERVIEWER

Well, what is this question of the necessity of obstacle?

COCTEAU

Without resistance you can do nothing.

INTERVIEWER

You were telling some story about the Impressionists and a Netherlander who bought them—which I think expressed one of your prime convictions: about the mutability of taste, or, really, the non-existence of bad-good in any real objective sense. And about that time I believe you suggested poetry does not translate. Rilke...

COCTEAU

Yes, Rilke was translating my "Orpheus" when he died. He wrote me that all poets speak a common language, but in different fashion. I am always badly translated.

INTERVIEWER

What I have read of your poetry in English does you no justice whatever.

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COCTEAU

I write with an apparent simplicity—which is really a ferocious mathematical calculation—the language and not the content. Which is to say the after-the-fact work, for, regrettably, our vehicles of communication in writing are conventions. If Picasso displaces an eye to make a portrait jump into life, or provoke collision which gives the sense of multi-view, that is one thing—if I displace a word to restore some of its freshness, that is a far, far more difficult thing. Translators, mistaking my simplicity for insubstantiality, render me superficial I am told. Miss Rosamond Lehmann tells me I am badly translated in English. *Tiens*, in German they thought to make my *La Difficulté d'Etre* the difficulty to *Leben*; no! the difficulty *zu sein*. The difficulty to live is another thing: taxes, complications, and all the rest. But the difficulty to *be*—ah! to be here; to exist.

INTERVIEWER

Well, of course, if I may put in here—it seems you are writing a language of considerable contraction out of a world in which there is a very substantial amount of changing light and shade. You have got to say a very great deal in a little space, if you are to convey simultaneity. You write somewhere that you mustn't look back (on your own product) for "might you not turn into a column of sugar if you looked back?" It is easy to take the surface of this joke; slide off. But it seems to me you evoke facetedness, glint, crystallization, perhaps even the cube, because you were intimately connected with the origins of Cubism; I don't want to go too far. I know from what you have told me that you do not "work these things up"—they jump into your mind. What are you to do, then? De-apt them? make them less apt and water them down? But that would be false. It is possible to think that here *is* a reaching for more mysterious truths, truths that issue from juxtaposition, on the part of a delicate and in its special way quite modest mind.

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COCTEAU

Story of course translates very well. Shakespeare translates in part because of his high *relief*—the immense relief of the tale derived from chronicles ordinarily, which one may read as one might read braille.

INTERVIEWER

But surely the world doesn't read Shakespeare for just a kind of Lamb's Tales approximation?

COCTEAU

No... Truly... There is something else. Madame Colette once said to me one needn't *read* the great poets, for they give off an atmosphere. It is truly very strange, too, that we poets can read one another, as Rilke says. With a friend to help with the words, I can read Shakespeare in English, but not the newspaper.

INTERVIEWER

Your own definition of poetry seems relevant here. You have said somewhere that when you love a piece of theatre others say it is not theatre, but something else; and if you love a film your friends say—that is not film but it is something else; and if you admire something in sport, they say... that is not sport but it is something else. And finally you have arrived at realizing that that "something else" is poetry.

COCTEAU

You see, you do not know what you *do*. It is not possible to do what one *intends*. The mechanism is too subtle for that, too secret. Apollinaire set out to duplicate Anatole France—his model—and failed magnificently. He created a new poetry, small, but valid. Some do a very small thing, as Apollinaire, and have a large reward, as he did finally; others, a great thing, as did Max Jacob, who was the true poet of Cubism, and not Apollinaire, and the result—one's gain and reputation—is minute. Baudelaire writes much fabricated verse and then—*tout à coup!*—poetry.

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INTERVIEWER

Isn't it the same in Shelley?

COCTEAU

Shelley. Keats. One single phrase, and the whole of the poem carried into the sky! Or Rimbaud commences writing poetry right from the start, and then simply gives it up because it is very evident the audience doesn't care.

INTERVIEWER

Is that really true?

COCTEAU

Yours and mine is a dreadful métier, my friend. The public is never pleased with what we do; wanting always a copy of what we have done. Why do we write: above all, publish? I posed this to my friend Genêt. "We do it because some force unknown to the public and also to us pushes us to," he said. And that is very true. When you speak of these things to one who works systematically—one such as Mauriac—they think you jest. Or that you are lazy and use this as an excuse. Put yourself at a desk and write! You are a writer, are you not? *Voilà!* I have tried this. What comes is no good. *Never any good.* Claudel at his desk from 9 to 12. It is unthinkable to work like that!

INTERVIEWER

Why, then, bother?

COCTEAU

When it goes well—the euphoria of such moments has been much the most intense and joyous of my life experience.

INTERVIEWER

What finally worked out between you and Gide? I read once in a French critic that his work always tended to keep to the surface, but yours plunged for the depths, with—sometimes—a considerable fracture of the waves, as well as sounding.

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COCTEAU

We commenced to dispute in the press toward 1919. Gide always wanted to be *visible*; for me, the poet is invisible. One who walks naked with impunity. Gide was the architect of his labyrinth, by which he negated the character of poet.

INTERVIEWER

Do you keep a sort of abstract potential reader or viewer in mind when you work?

COCTEAU

You are always concentrated on the inner thing. The moment one becomes aware of the crowd—performs for the crowd—it is spectacle. It is *fichu*.

INTERVIEWER

Can you say something about inspiration?

COCTEAU

It is not *in*spiration; it is expiration. (the gaunt, fine hands on the thorax; evacuation of the chest; a great breathing out from himself)

INTERVIEWER

Are there any artificial helps—stimulants or drugs? You resorted to opium after the death of Radiguet, wrote your book about it "Opium", and were I believe in a period of disintoxication from it when you wrote *Les Enfants Terribles*.

COCTEAU

It is very useful to have some depressant, perhaps. Extreme fatigue can serve. Filming "Beauty And The Beast" on the Loire in 1945 immediately at the end of the war, I was very ill. Everything went wrong. Electricity failures nearly every day; planes passing over just at the moment of a scene. Jean Marais's horses made difficulties, and he persisted in vaulting onto them himself out of second floor windows, refusing a double, and risking his bones. And the sunlight changes every

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minute on the Loire. All these things contributed to the virtue of the film. And in "The Blood Of A Poet" Man Ray's wife played a rôle; she had never acted. Her exhaustion and fear paralyzed her and she passed before the cameras so stunned she remembered nothing afterwards. In the rushes we saw she was splendid; with the outer part suppressed, she had been let perform.

INTERVIEWER

We have these great difficulties of communication in print. All our readers are not John Gielgud or Louis Jouvet, and unfortunately when they read a novel they must play the parts. How are we to get across the shadings? I pose this because I know you have experimented with this technical dilemma. I hope you will let me reproduce 8 lines of your *Le Cap de Bonne-Espérance*...

COCTEAU

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

I will not need to translate. That will not be the point.

Mon œuvre encoche
et là
et là
et là (*sudden discovery*
et
là (*descent inward, with a note of*
dort *grief almost*
la profonde poésie.

Whatever else, I am sure few readers would supply that phrasing if your words were printed on a straight line.

COCTEAU

Very difficult.

INTERVIEWER

Rossellini, in Rome, told me that if he were to put down

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in a script all his imagination casts up for the scene he would have to write a novel; but in fiction we must put it down, or it is lost.

COCTEAU

And the public is lazy! You ask them to enter into habits of thinking other than their own, and they don't want to. And then... what you have written in autograph changes in typewriting, and again in print. Painting is more satisfying because it is more direct; you work directly on the surface.

INTERVIEWER

We are struggling with imponderables here...

COCTEAU

But of course. The Cubists had to get rid of the whole question of subject, which is a *thing*, to express the poetry—or art—which is a thing also. And that was the meaning of Cubism, and not the accident that Matisse noticed the forms were cubic.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of the French new-novelists who are beginning to abandon subject—Robbe-Grillet? Nathalie Sarraute?

COCTEAU

I must make a disagreeable confession. I read nothing within the lines of my work. I find it very disconcerting; I disorient "the other". I have not looked at a newspaper in twenty years; if one is brought into the room, I flee. This is not because I am indifferent but because one cannot follow every road. And nevertheless such a thing as the tragedy of Algeria undoubtedly enters into one's work, doubtless plays its rôle in the fatigued and useless state in which you find me. Not that—"I do not wish to lose Algeria!"—but the useless killing, killing for the sake of killing. In fear of the police, men keep to a certain conduct; but when they become the police they are terrible. No, one feels shame at being a part of

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the human race. About novels: I read detective fiction, espionage, science fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Do you recommend then to writers they read nothing serious at all?

COCTEAU

(shrugs). I myself do not.

INTERVIEWER

To get back to that about Algeria, and so on (was asked a few moments later)—as a point of clarification—I gather you mean the writer can't escape his world but oughtn't to let his detail memory be too much interfered with?

And here Cocteau did something odd. He stood—rather tiredly—he was very slight, quite small—his photographs belie and do not really convey him; Picasso, for one, is wholly portrayed by his photos and if you have seen them you know him—and he went with slow steps to an end table. And he took up a tube of silver cardboard or foil, which made a cylinder mirror upon its outside. And he placed it down carefully in the exact center of an indecipherable photograph which was spread flat on this table, that I would learn was Rubens' "Crucifixion" taken with a camera that shot in round. Masses of fog blurred out in the photo; elongations without sense. Upon the tube, which corresponded in some unseen fashion with the camera, the maker, the photograph was restored—swirls became men. Nevertheless, the objective photograph remained insane.

He didn't say anything. Later on, he did remark, seated wearily—"I feel sorry for the young. It is not at all as it was in the Paris of 16. Paris has become an automobile garage. Neon, jazz—condition everything. And it is not at all as it was, a young man sitting writing by a candle. In Montparnasse, we never thought of a 'public.' It was all between ourselves. A great scientist came here the other day—he said 'there is al-

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most nothing left to be discovered.' And we know nothing about the mind! Nothing! Evtuchenko came to me. We had absolutely nothing to say to each other. Do you know why? There were twenty or thirty photographers and journalists there to snap and misrepresent it all. And the young are in a limbo that hasn't a future. Their auto accidents—to express their sense of the shortness of tenure. The world is very tired; we go back to the Charleston, the clothes of the twenties. And speleology—that is a rage here—burrowing down to the most primitive caves."

INTERVIEWER

You wrote one of your novels in three weeks; one of your theatre pieces in a single night. What does this tell us about the act of composition?

COCTEAU

If the force functions, it goes well. If not, you are helpless.

INTERVIEWER

Is there no way to get it started, crank it up?

COCTEAU

In painting, yes. By application to all the mechanical details one commences to begin. For writing "one receives an order..."

INTERVIEWER

Françoise Sagan—others—describe how writing begins to flow with the use of the pen. I thought this was rather general experience.

COCTEAU

If the ideas come, one must hurry to set them down out of fear of forgetting them. They come once; once only. On the other hand, if I am obliged to do some little task... such as writing a preface or notice... the labor to give the appearance of easiness to the few lines is excruciating. I have no facility

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whatever. Yes, in one respect what you say is true. I had written a novel, then fallen silent. And the editors at the publishing house of Stock, seeing this, said—You have too great a fear of not writing a masterpiece. Write something, anything. Merely to begin. So I did—and wrote the first lines of *Les Enfants Terribles*. But that is only for beginnings—in fiction. I have never written unless deeply moved about something. The one exception is my play *La Machine à Ecrire*. I had written the play *Les Parents Terribles* and it was very successful, and something was wanted to follow. *La Machine à Ecrire* exists in several versions, which is very telling, and was an *enormous* amount of work. It is no good at all. Of course, it is one of the most popular of my works. If you make fifty designs and one or two please you least, these will nearly surely be the ones most liked. No doubt because they resemble something. People love to recognize; not venture. The former is so much more comfortable and self-flattering.

It seems to me nearly the whole of your work can be read as indirect spiritual autobiography.

INTERVIEWER

The wound in the hand of the poet in your film "The Blood Of A Poet"—the wound in the man's hand out of which the poetry speaks—certainly this reproduces the "wound" of your experience in poetry around 1912–1914? "The horse of Orpheus"—without which he remains terrestrial— is surely that poetic and invisible "other" in you of which you speak...

COCTEAU

En effet! The work of every creator is autobiography, even if he does not know it or wish it, even if his work is "abstract." It is why you cannot redo your work.

INTERVIEWER

Not rewrite? Is that absolutely precluded?

COCTEAU

Very superficially. Simply the syntax and orthography. And even there— My long poem—"Requiem"—has just

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come out from Gallimard. I leave repetitions, maladresses, words badly placed quite unchanged, and there is no punctuation. It would be artificial to impose punctuation on a black river of ink. 170 pages—yes—and no punctuation. None. I was finishing staging one of my things in Nice; I said to the leading woman—"when the curtain is to come down, fall as if you had lost all your blood." After the première next night, I collapsed. And it was found I had been unknowingly hemorrhaging within for days, and had almost no blood. Hurrah!—my conscious self at lowest ebb, the being within me exults. I commence to write—difficultly above my head in bed, with a stylo Bic*, as a fly walks on the ceiling. It took me three years to decipher the script; I finally change nothing. One must fire on the target, after all, as Stendhal does. What matter how it is said? I have told you I dislike Pascal because I dislike his skepticism, but I like his style! He repeats the same word five times in a sentence. What has "Salammbô" to say to me? Nothing. Flaubert is simply bad. *Montaigne* is the best writer in French. Simply out of the language, almost argot. Almost slang. Straight out. It is so nearly always...

(At this one point in the tape-recording we have now reached, and as I remember only here, his voice loses its vibrant timbre—it "bleeds out." His voice was exceptionally young; here it becomes faded. One feels sure he recognizes the imputations for the art of writing in the decision not to correct; I recall that if *La Machine à Ecrire* was a disaster clearly because it was intentional effort, then the successful "*Parents Terribles*" was "*dicté*" in a state of near somnambulism; there is the temptation to rerun the tape many times at this point, and ponder. That "*dicté*"—combined with "retouch nothing, not even orthography"—frightens; Picasso seen at firsthand too touches this terror; for it is certain that it is his line which writes, through all his later art, a living line, which he merely watches; a dilemma of the Montparnasse generation; one feels Cocteau has looked into this chasm inwardly many times, and that here is his courage...)

* *ball-point pen*

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INTERVIEWER

By *refaire*, a moment ago, I think you did not quite mean rewrite.

COCTEAU

(resignedly). What is wanted is only what one has already done. Another "Blood Of A Poet..." Another "Orpheus..." It is not even possible. Picasso remarked the other day that the bump on my nose bridge is that of my grandfather—but that I did not have it when I was forty. My nose was straight. One changes, and is not what one was.

INTERVIEWER

Radiguet?...

COCTEAU

Oh, he was very young. There was an enormous creative liberation in Paris. It was stopped—guillotined—by the Aristotelian rule of Cubism. Radiguet was fifteen when he first appeared. His father was a cartoonist, and Raymond used to bring in his work to deliver it to the papers. If his father didn't produce, then Radiguet did the sketches himself. One day, in the rue d'Anjou, the maid announced that there was "a young man with a cane" downstairs. Raymond came up—he was fifteen—and commenced to tell me all about art. We were his whole history, you see, and he'd been used to lie on the bank of the Seine out of Paris and read us. He had decided we were all wrong.

INTERVIEWER

How?

COCTEAU

He said that an avant-garde commences standing, and ends seated soon enough. He meant, in the academic chair.

INTERVIEWER

What did he propose?

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COCTEAU

He said we should imitate the great classics. We would miss; and that miss would be our originality. So later on he set out to imitate *La Princesse de Cléves* and wrote *Le Bal du Comte d'Orgel* and I sought to imitate "The Charterhouse of Parma" and wrote "*Thomas l'Imposteur.*"

INTERVIEWER

How old was he when he wrote "The Devil In The Flesh"? One still sees that novel in so many of the bookshop windows of Paris.

COCTEAU

Oh, he was very young. He died at the end of his teens. That was—in '21—yes—two years before. He was remarkable in that he began perfectly from the beginning, without error.

INTERVIEWER

How is that possible?

COCTEAU

Ah. Answer that! He slept on the floor or on a table from house to house of the various painters. Then in the summer vacation with me on the Bay of Arcachon he wrote "*The Devil In The Flesh*"; *Bal du Comte d'Orgel* he did not even write, but sat and dictated to Georges Auric, who tapped it out on the machine as they went. I looked on, and he simply talked it all out. Rapidly and effortlessly. And it is flawless style. He was a Chinese Mandarin with the naïveté of a child.

INTERVIEWER

Those were certainly very remarkable days. Modigliani. Yourself. Apollinaire.

COCTEAU

I will recount one thing; then you must let me rest. You perhaps know the work of the painter Domergue? The long girls; calendar art, I am afraid. He had a domestique in those

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days—a "housemaid" who would make the beds, fill the coal scuttles. We all gathered in those days at the Café Rotonde. And a little man with a bulging forehead and black goatee would come there sometimes for a glass, and to hear us talk. And to "look at the painters..." This was the "housemaid" of Domergue, out of funds. We asked him once (he said nothing and merely listened) what he did. He said he meant to overthrow the government of Russia. We all laughed, because of course we did too. That is the kind of time it was! It was Lenin.

INTERVIEWER

Your position as by far the most celebrated literary figure in France is crowned by the French Academy, Belgian Royal Academy, Oxford honoris causa and so on. Yet I suppose that these are "faults"?

COCTEAU

It is necessary always to oppose. The avant-garde—if that is enthroned.

Cocteau at dinner in Paris, a little restaurant in the 16th arrondissement.

COCTEAU

Critics? A critic serverely criticized my lighting at a Saturday evening opening in Munich. I thanked him but there was no time to change anything for the Sunday matinee. He felicitated me on the improvement. "You see how my suggestions helped?" he said. No, there will always be a conflict between creators and the technicians of the métier.

INTERVIEWER

I was struck by the banality of Alberto Moravia in an interview with a movie actress recently in the French press.

COCTEAU

I saw him on TV and he was very mediocre. But that is the difficulty. That is the kind of thing that goes down with the

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public. And all they want are names.

★

COCTEAU

Appreciation of art is a moral erection; otherwise mere dilettantism. I believe sexuality is the basis of all friendship.

★

COCTEAU

This sickness, to express oneself. What is it?

—WILLIAM FIFIELD

PABLO PICASSO

A COMPOSITE INTERVIEW

William Fifield put on his deerstalking cap and went off in search of the black-winged redbird Pablo Picasso. He turned up some clues out of which every man may reconstruct his own oiseau.

GEORGES RAMIÉ

He came here in 1946 simply as a visitor. He asked to fashion a few pottery pieces and leave them with me for baking.

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FIFIELD

Was Vallauris pottery still in the old-fashioned moustache-cup tradition?

RAMIÉ

The war had broken things up. We were experimenting. I think Picasso sensed this and saw further into the possibilities of innovation than the rest of us.

FIFIELD

What happened?

RAMIÉ

He went away. Silence for a year. In 1947 he came back and when he had looked at his pieces left here he seemed to *see* them—as though in them were the discoveries his hands had arrived at almost by accident—but guided accident if unconscious—and he sat down right then and commenced.

FIFIELD

You mean literally made pieces then and there?

RAMIÉ

In back—there. By the wheel. He became a Vallauris potter at once, made thousands of pieces now in the museums of the whole world, still goes on with it but sends in models from Mougins now, worked harder than any laborer—a real artisan. You got the impression his hands had printed what to do—in those '46 pieces— and he had to wait a year to see.

FIFIELD

You'd say it all commences with the hands?

RAMIÉ

Bien entendu! You have only to watch him.

FIFIELD

A little like Nijinsky dancing? I mean, something that can't go wrong?

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RAMIÉ

He is an empiricist. That is why he has no school—though there are some imitators here in the town—goes from one thing to the next, creating while the theorists are arguing the sex of angels. It's a constant evasion of theory towards some eventual syntax entirely unforeseen.

FIFIELD

I'd like to get this straight from the *toro's* mouth, not to be disrespectful. I know him a little—have gone to bullfights with him—only—I've got something else in mind too.

RAMIÉ

Toro. Bull. He has that in him. Not in sense of angry charge—that is his myth. But something solid and terrestrial and close to nature in him. I know what you mean by "only" —no, he sees nobody now. *Impossible* to see him.

FIFIELD

You agree his art is like dancing?

RAMIÉ

Like talking. You don't reflect in the doing.

FIFIELD

It's right you don't reflect in talking *as* you talk.

RAMIÉ

You see him *feeling* the form. It's art in motion.

(Georges Ramié, master potter, Vallauris, a large man in shirt sleeves like a Fernand Léger—in town they say: "He loves to amuse himself better than work"—surroundings of the Picasso copies, 25 to maximum of 300 after the originals twenty to eighty dollars, the originals from $ 2,000, owls, impudent fauns, bullfighting, the dance, all the iconography of Picasso.)

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(There were 20 potters in Vallauris when Picasso came in 1946–7. Today 150. Some are real creators, wholly apart from Picasso. One is Kostanda. Mme. Kostanda *mère* was a potter. Husband a White Army officer—came Lenin, fled Russia. "We were starving here, Vallauris a desert. And think that two thousand years ago the pagans made pottery here half naked and happy! A small revival just before the war owing to Socialist fares on the French RR. and the people for the first time came to the Riviera—bought souvenirs. But the real revival came with Picasso." Her son the potter now, unique creator in *grès* at Vallauris, styles himself *potier-créateur*.

KOSTANDA

Yes, it is true we are now all nearly rich. But look at that stuff across the street.

FIFIELD

You can't have the tourists' money without their effluvium. The last time I was here it was Picasso's eightieth birthday. You couldn't get through the streets.

KOSTANDA

We had to bring everything inside to keep it from being smashed or stolen.

FIFIELD

What struck me was—hardly anybody of the thousands and thousands liked Picasso's work. I overheard them groaning about it in the chapel of *Guerre et Paix*—if their language wasn't French and they thought they wouldn't be understood. If anybody looked or listened they admired it. When they ran the retrospective Picasso films your Eden movie house up on the square was packed while the Verdet film "Clay And Flame Of Vallauris"... played. Vallauris people—because I'd hear cried out: '*C'est Gustave! c'est Maxim là*!, Or—*C'est Picasso*.' All in the same tone. Then Clouzot's film on Picasso's art came on the screen—and within a few minutes half the audience had walked out. I got two things from it:

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he must have been a good artisan and townsman here; and most of the plain people gave a very small damn about his art.

KOSTANDA

Radio Télévision Française interviewed crowds in the street. Practically everyone said defensively—"Well, we like his early things."

FIFIELD

They were the rose and blue periods. He was twenty-five when that ended. Fame is a peculiar thing because this town was jammed with those who came from everywhere for Picasso and only an infinite minority liking his art. I came on one proud old Frenchman a mile away up above Cannes. He said: "I wouldn't go as far as Vallauris for *him*. These painters amuse themselves. It's the decadence of art." It makes me think celebrity may be some kind of universalized telepathy unisolated yet. Akin to the peasant crusades of the Middle Ages.

KOSTANDA

Picasso is nearly totally inaccessible. He's always seen artisans, if he won't see anybody else, but now he won't even see them. He doesn't see Ramié. We're getting out the "Book of Vallauris" and Picasso's working on the lithography, but he won't see the printer and communicates by post. Not to see a printer—a workman—that's never happened before.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

PORTANIER

Why should he see people? Besides, he's past eighty.

FIFIELD

Are you influenced by Picasso of Antibes?

PORTANIER

If you like.

FIFIELD

I am very hesitant to attempt to sum Picasso up because I

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think that would be peculiarly likely to falsify him. If I am to be true to him I have to work out some principle of eliminating selectivity, as he has. Probably most of us work out some sort of theory almost as a sales approach to life, and conform ourselves to it—then call it our "belief". Picasso flees static formulation—which if I am not mistaken he calls "beauty". You're really more a painter than potter, using pottery as a vehicle because of (Picasso-created) demand. What do you think of his "Guerre et Paix" mural in the chapel here?

PORTANIER

Badly painted and a work of genius.

FIFIELD

I don't grasp that.

PORTANIER

Picasso is a bad painter in the sense that he has no feel for colors but he is a genius of form. The chapel is bad but great.

FIFIELD

Why great?

PORTANIER

It moves you.

FIFIELD

Not me. It repels me. I have gone in twelve times. Tried. But it's like the Clouzot film—you see Picasso reach something, and then he deforms it.

PORTANIER

It's the rejection of beauty.

FIFIELD

That seems mad in an artist.

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PORTANIER

Listen. When you try to learn the piano you employ a lot of effort—but a concert pianist has achieved a second nature where he lives within such skills. Picasso could design kilometers of "beauty".

(Chemin des Potiers, Vallauris, great vases on bellies of which airy, gay, ribald "Picasso of Grimaldi Museum"—Portanier's pen-like brush having everything of Picasso's, save the originality—lean, soft-spoken young man in blue jeans and sandals, fine-threaded brown hair round as if cut with a bowl, naïve blue eyes, but startlingly harsh with his child; gypsy-camp atmosphere. I am beginning to suspect every man has his own Picasso, showing me "Picasso" shows me himself, I resolve if I ever set these interrogations down I must set down too something of the recording instruments. "Maybe you don't get the object but you get the observers. Maybe, in fact, Pablo Picasso would be but one of these.")

FIFIELD

Lucien, is he really Andalusian? You know his mother—the Picasso, that is—Maria Picasso—was of Italian origin. His first Toulouse-Lautrec things, around 1900, when he'd just come to Paris, bear the Ruiz Picasso signature, but he soon dropped the Ruiz—well, José Ruiz (Blasco) was certainly professor at the *Escuela de Artes Oficios* in Malaga, in Andalusia, when Pablo was born. But by the time his son was twenty and had left for Paris Ruiz had taught art also in Galicia, Madrid and Barcelona. Now was Ruiz Andalusian or merely *posted* in Andalusia? If Picasso had been born ten years later would he have been Galician? The great "Galician" painter? That is a very different kind of human. A very strange thing is that everybody talks and writes of Picasso and I have been utterly unable to find out if he is Andalusian, for example. Do you know?

CLERGUE

No.

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FIFIELD

Nobody talks of the Italian strain. Now, if you want to comprehend a genius it would seem to my innocent mind the first thing you'd want to know would be his stock. It seems to me Picasso criticism is peculiarly legless.

CLERGUE

Ask Cooper. Picasso's like an Andalusian, anyhow.

FIFIELD

Yes—he's like some of those little watertight old men you see in Spain. And an Italian writer has likened him to a retired sea captain—Genoese, Greek or Spanish—with the keen eyes from looking out into long distances.

CLERGUE

He's very generous.

FIFIELD

That—with his disorderedness—could be taken for Andalusian.

CLERGUE

When subalterns (picadors or banderilleros, not so much the rich matadors) are injured in the bullfights here in France he goes to their aid—sends money.

FIFIELD

Not wishing to be cynical but in the spirit of honest inquiry that could be said in the case of Picasso to "cost him nothing."

CLERGUE

An old banderillero was hurt at Nîmes. Pablo made the journey all the way from Cannes to visit him.

FIFIELD

Well, he's been generous with you. Illustrated your volumes of photographs gratis, sent you to America for your exposition of photos at the Museum of Modern Art in New

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York. You knocked on his door with no other introduction than your work a few years ago—and he simply took you in. You've discribed it often for me, Lucien—opened up his arms wide to you—then when Mme. Ramié, who was present, asked him what she was to do in Paris where she'd be next day, completely forgot about himself and said—just one thing, make people look at this boy's photographs. You said once you had told him you were afraid people wouldn't buy your photographs because they didn't like them—a morbid cast, in your case—Picasso answered pretty autobiographically that it made no difference if they liked them or not but that they'd buy them as soon as *they got used to them*. It remains true that your early photographs were directly based on the Picasso art of the harlequin period.

CLERGUE

Yes, he wants to be admired. Yes, he likes to form a coterie. Perhaps if the photos had been from other sources—On the other hand, he has a real affection for *workers*: for those who work, who make an effort. One day I arrived at La Californie and there were still parts of a manifesto stuck on his portal. He greeted me—"*Ça va, Lucien?*" "*Oui. Ça va, Pablo?*" "*Oui. Ça va bien?*" "*Et toi? Ça va bien, Pablo?*" He said: "*Tu sais comment ça va.*" "Yes. We won't talk about it if you like." "Yes. That would be better."—but he went on: "They asked a sketch of me. Why should I give it? They offer nothing—no work. You come here with work to show me. For you, I am at your orders. Whenever you want, I will do what you like. But I gave them nothing. Then they paste up a manifesto saying I am not generous. That is bad—eh?" On the other hand, he can be cruel and keep another waiting for months.

FIFIELD

Do you see him now?

CLERGUE

Impossible to see him. I went there—I was told by the gate telephone he was packing to go to Japan. A *boutade*.

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FIFIELD

What about his Communism?

CLERGUE

He is a close friend of Aragon, and was closer to Eluard who joined the Communist Party with him the same day. Perhaps you must take into account his position as an anti-Fascist Spaniard in a France which, just after the war, was strongly directed by the Communists—who had stood against the Nazis, as Picasso had too. But his proletarianism isn't doubtful. He inhabits mansions, but lives in their kitchens.

FIFIELD

Why the mansions?

CLERGUE

Because he needs space to put things. He fills up a house with his works, and when there's no more room moves on to another.

FIFIELD

You said he stood up against the Nazis.

CLERGUE

He took grave risks—because he could hardly afford to be deported to Spain. *Now* Spain wants to stage a great comprehensive Picasso showing, just as famous Rightists are being fêted in Moscow. Actually, Pablo agreed—on condition "Guernica" and the "Lies Of Franco" be included—the idea was dropped. In Paris during the Occupation a Nazi officer came to him and said—admiringly—"Are you the man who made Guernica?" Picasso said: "No. You are." But when an American general came later and said it must be just wonderful to be able to paint like that he said—"You should understand. It's like firing an A-bomb. The great thing is not to miss." When there was the Fascist outbreak, his answer was "Guernica." After Budapest his reply was silence—refusal to work—and he wrote a demand for explanation to the headquarters of the Party. A letter which, I believe, was

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unanswered. At the time of the '29 crash he said to Kahnweiler: "Good. Tomorrow we start from nothing. I do not like it when my son is pointed out as the son of the richest man in the village."

FIFIELD

But Picasso does not know true poverty. For him to be wiped out is very different from the lot of another. His luxury is to do exactly as he likes at all times. And that is based on a success which involves money.

CLERGUE

But he was poor. With Max Jacob and Léger in Paris. They had only one bed and he and Léger had to use it in shifts.

FIFIELD

That lasted a very short time.

CLERGUE

Two or three years.

FIFIELD

That is a very short span of struggle to be formative in the long life of Picasso.

CLERGUE

If your purpose, Bill, is to grasp Picasso an interesting method would be to study the pictures he's kept for himself—published in the book of David Douglas Duncan. Why has he retained them? Because they are the best in his judgment; or failures he doesn't want to release?

FIFIELD

I am greatly mistaken if the Picasso method isn't to release everything. We argued yesterday over the undeniable crude infantilism of one of the sketches among the "Déjeuner sur l'Herbe" variations on Manet—from the octogenarian (extremely mature) hand of the world's greatest living artist!—but the propulsion to non-selfcriticism is profound.

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CLERGUE

He won't hear talk of death or growing old. A friend one day mentioned the death of an intimate of them both. "What! Is she dead?" demanded Picasso. Later Jacqueline told the friend aside: "You have given him a year. You have made him a year older. Of course he knew she was dead. But he wouldn't accept it."

Postcard to a leading British art critic, close friend of Picasso, Picasso collector since the 'twenties with finest private collection Picasso's, Léger's, Gris's at his château in France: "Is Picasso Andalusian by blood or merely birth locality? What is the chance of getting in to interview him?" Reply: "No chance of interviewing Picasso. Regards to you and your wife. DC."

Jean Cocteau (a few months before his death)—

FIFIELD

Perhaps he's the first painter in motion—like film—to be seen in series, not the individual stop-frame.

COCTEAU

Yes! He says that all the time...

FIFIELD

You are the greatest expositor of Pablo Picasso, I should think very likely including Picasso. Your testimony is invaluable because you have been with him side by side through the whole art revolution from 1916 onwards and because you have said his principle of permanent revolution and refreshment in art is the chief single influence in your own creative universe. Thus you know from both outside and inside. When the barbarism—African art—and then two-plane instead of three-plane surface appear with the arrival of Cubism and rejection of perspective, and Picasso quits his early work —the Toulouse-Lautrec influence and then the "pathétiques" of clowns and paupers in rose and blue—what theory does he form?

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COCTEAU

He has no theory. He cannot have because the creation ends at his wrists. Here. (Cocteau touches two beautiful thin-coupled wrists, quite different from the *costaud* wrists of Picasso.) His mind does not enter in; there is an insulation, a defense, which he has formalized over years. It is the hand—*la main de gloire*—one thinks of the sacred mummy hand capable of opening any door, but severed at the wrist...

FIFIELD

I'd like to show you what, in a groping way, I've commenced to attempt upon Picasso. These beginning lines: too-plain and unformed-up of course. "Every man is an enigma. If you solve him you can be sure you have falsified him. There is no human judgment without an observer, and the observer conditions the observation. This quest after the reality of Pablo Picasso is conditioned by (1) exteriority of Picasso when he has become observer of his own art (2) the observers questioned (3) this writer who cannot but use principles of selection, in which the clever could easily read his autograph—."

COCTEAU

(Wearily smiling). These are things exceedingly difficult to define. Were one to go into their true intricacies his reward would be that the auditor would turn away—because he is lazy. An essential problem is that one cannot know, questions of formulation and art are too complicated for it to be possible for one to foresee, and one *simply does not know*. Perhaps for this reason Picasso says of painting—that it is the art of the blind. He never reflects; never halts; makes no attempt to concentrate his expression in a given work... to produce a *chef-d'œuvre*. With him, nothing is superfluous and nothing is of capital importance.

FIFIELD

Could this be another way of saying that everything is of capital importance for the total *œuvre*—but spread or diffused, not compacted—as in a Da Vinci?

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COCTEAU

He has done that once or twice. Formulated "Guernica." And the "Demoiselles d'Avignon"—which it must be recognized was the beginning of Picassan art, before which there is no "Picasso" though there are Picassos. He finds first, and afterwards researches. Not, as is sometimes said, surfacing that given by intuition—but rather accommodating to the discoveries of his hand. It is important to know that this puts one in constant flight from oneself; from one's "experience." Like Orpheus, Picasso pipes and the objects fall in line after him, the most diverse, and submit to his will. But what that will is—?

FIFIELD

I wonder if you recall what you wrote about him in 1923?

COCTEAU

If you would recall for me—.

FIFIELD

You wrote: "He contents himself with painting, acquiring an incomparable métier, and placing it at the service of hasard. I have often seen Picasso seek to quit his Muse—that's to say, attempt to paint like everyone else. He quickly returns, eyes blindfolded..."

COCTEAU

Yes. In 1917 I induced him to attempt stage design; the settings for "Parade". Sergei Diaghilev had brought his company to Paris, though the preparations for "Parade" were actually done in Rome, and the ballet was a work of Satie and myself. One day the company was on stage rehearsing when we noticed a *vide*—a space—in the stage design. Picasso caught up a pot of ink and, with a few strokes, instantly, caused lines to explode into Grecian columns—so spontaneously, abruptly and astonishingly that everyone applauded. I asked him after: "Did you know beforehand what you were going to do?" He said: "Yes and no. The unconscious must

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work without our knowing it." You see, art is a marriage of the conscious and the unconscious. The artist must not interfere. Picasso too does not want to be interfered with. When we were at dinner at DC's the first satellite passed over. "*Ça m'emmerde*," he said—"That sullies me. What has it to do with me?" He is wholly concentrated on his work—more than any other man I know—inhumanly! He needs nothing outside his own closed universe. He rebuffs his friends—but sees nonentities—why? Because, he says, he does not want to nurture feelings of resentment against those few he loves: who, alone, can disorient him. He does not want to resent their intrusion—on the permanent gestation. Yet—how strange it is that this art—so completely "closed"...that is, personal and isolate, has the great popular success. It entirely contradicts the shibboleth of the artist's contact with his audience.

FIFIELD

Do you think I can penetrate this closed universe—be one of those *raseurs* (bores) you say he will occasionally see because they merely vex him, like flies, but cannot disturb his processes—and get his (undoubtedly partial and biased) opinion on him?

COCTEAU

He would tell you nothing! He *never* discusses the rationale. How can he, for it is a process of the hands—manual, plastic. He would reply with *boutades*, jokes and absurdities: he lives behind them, in the protection of them, as if they were quills of the hedgehog. His tremendous work—he works more than any other man alive—is flight from the emptiness of life, and from any kind of formalism of anything. Expressionism has gone on and on knotting the cord—till it seems likely there is nothing left to knot but the void. But if the Montparnasse revolution has come to its end Picasso seems able to go on. Believe me!—he does not know what to *do* but he knows unerringly what not to do. His hand knows where not to go, to avoid the stroke of the slightest banality, the least bit academ-

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ic—a *constant* renewal—but where it does go, where the line does go, is merely the only place left.

FIFIELD

Why does he deify the ugly? The effect on his psyche of the Spanish War?

COCTEAU

Do you know he made the first sketches in the direction of "Guernica" *before* the Spanish War?

FIFIELD

As you drew your hideous and raven-mawed Eugènes slightly before the 1914 war which was their inspiration. But that is either owing to the *intemporel*—or confusion of sequential time, as you call it—or else to the clouds gathering for the storm, which one (such as you or Picasso) senses.

COCTEAU

The real inspiration of "Guernica" was Goya...

FIFIELD

Even so, Picasso was turned to the late Goya by the Civil War? It seems as if Picasso is transported "bodily" more than altered by an influence, even if remaining in a frame of art-reference.

COCTEAU

Art is but an extension of the life process for him, not differentiated. Buffet criticized him publicly and when he was asked to retort by judging Buffet's art he said: "I do not look at his art. I do not like the way he lives." When he had been particularly heartless and inaccessible in a human situation I confronted him with it. "I am as I paint," he said. *Tiens, mon ami*, it takes great courage to be original! The *first* time a thing appears it disconcerts everyone, the artist too. But you have to leave it—not retouch it. *Of course* you must then canonize the "bad". For the good is the familiar. The new ar-

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rives only by mischance. As Picasso says, it is a *fault*. And by sanctifying our *faults* we create. "It is too easy when you have a certain proficiency to be right."—he says.

FIFIELD

Does Picasso consciously try to displease—reserve to himself the right to displease like his *torero* friend Luis Miguel Dominguin? You told me how pleasant the original sketches for his chapel of "La Guerre et La Paix" were, and how he progressively deformed them until we have the final work —which is pretty frightening—and which you tell me made Matisse so terrified of being caught at producing conventional beauty that he deformed *his* chapel at Vence...

COCTEAU

He thinks neither of pleasing nor displeasing. He doesn't think of that at all.

FIFIELD

Yes. On the sound track of "Le Mystère Picasso" Clouzot suddenly asks him what the audience will think—he answers spontaneously: "I haven't given a thought to the public in years." That is a damn chilly moment, if taken to its furthest implications; that and the scene when he draws magnificently—with one of the greatest hands in the history of art—effaces. obliterates, finally says: "Now I see where I am. Now I begin."

COCTEAU

You know he has said: "Reality is found at the bottom of the well."

FIFIELD

You make me think of your own statement—that art can be only self-portraiture. But perhaps this is to oversimplify and a closer cast to your meaning is in your comment that the greatest Picasso's are so owing to their plastic rapport, achieved apart from subject.

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COCTEAU

Yes, the suppression of subject was the departure point of the Cubist adventure; if it became formalized and Stalinian in some, it did not in Picasso.

FIFIELD

A hidden art process, I think, can only be divined, not stated. It doesn't make my job here easier—.

COCTEAU

Picasso insults the human visage—in every sense—but with love, in his fashion.

I go away thinking, this man Picasso has to be alone—I recall Cocteau saying "Chaplin is the same, like Picasso shuts himself in with himself and misprises his friends"—yes, that the inner ferment may boil up untinctured. Alone from himself, no doubt. *Notre Dame de Vie. Former estate of Guinness* ("Guinness is good for you")—*cypresses, olive trees—Mougins in the distance, a red tile pile on a hilltop dominated by its "campanile" like some town in Italy. Distant bells. Light sea wind from Cannes far below, where is a glimpse of the sea. Wild hills covered with broom behind Notre Dame de Vie chapel. In the yard beneath, unkempt great long tails of grass. Silence.* In that villa below my feet, the inaccessible little man—alone with his art. I go away.

A lean-faced very masculine man, with gray-blue level eyes, a resonant French "r", so resonant in the bass-nasal register as to be exceptionally difficult to comprehend: of the masculine world of Gary Cooper/ Hemingway/Yves Montand/Picasso. 9.30 at night and a long day's physical work but he ate very lightly and sparingly of white asparagus tips, veal, and berries, and he drank beer. Formless corduroys, workman's shoes, and loose brown sweater over his naked chest, the sleeves pulled up. "Agriculture will support art," he says. "Otherwise you are in the hands of the art dealers and your integrity melts like *this*"—clench of the muscular hand. "A man has to be his own." ...So asked permission of certain

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painters "only the masters"—at different times—to weave tapestries of their paintings: said he did it for money but said also "to learn by transposition not copying, entering within their art processes." "I did Guernica about 1955. Léger's, Picasso's, Delaunay's... Picasso is the most modest of them all. He is a *monsieur*. He has a marvelous sense of 'things'. He talks very little. I don't believe he has a gift of expression in words. He is a great plastician... He is an intuitive, yes. But spontaneous after years of inner reflection. Talk of art? Well—he talks of the canvases in work, showing them. But doesn't comment them. I've a channel to talk: because he commences to discuss, compare my tapestries versus his originals. 'They don't like you, eh?' he said to me once. 'Who?' 'The others. Because this is good.' That gives you a glimpse within —if that's what you're looking for. Areas of his canvas are not even painted; you see this if you have to weave the space. The greater master a painter becomes, the thinner his paint. You see the stuff right through often enough. Cézanne's first things are thick-paint: he was searching, experimenting, didn't know what he was doing with surety—late, very thin. Picasso is extremely sure and rapid. He went at Guernica—oh I think five times. You see the overlays. Tapestry isn't a copy of painting—because the materials differ. So Guernica in tapestry isn't, can't be, shouldn't be 'Guernica'... Picasso alone knew this. He said: Go ahead. Exact copies are impossible. Nothing can ever be done twice. Start new each time. Never copy! —I am going there with my new weaving of his Bathing Woman. Why not come and judge him for yourself?"

PICASSO

Too many things! Too many things! Too many things! There isn't any room for so many things! (Forty or fifty canvases, linoleum cuts, materials. He starts to elucidate several works including the portrait of Jacqueline at present on his easel. Breaks off.) It's difficult to explain these things.

FIFIELD

Who can explain Picasso?

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PICASSO

(It's necessary to understand...)

FIFIELD

Can you?

PICASSO

(pause) Sometimes.

When we had entered the heteroclitic room Pablo Picasso sprang up, naked to the waist, wearing narrow-legged elegant slacks and loafers, and, his black eyes a-twinkle, greeted us gaily. "An American author," my friend Dürrbach, the weaver and sculptor, said. "Very well. How are you?" Picasso answered—with an expansive let-come-who-may shrug, in English. (He speaks some English; Jacqueline, who learned it all in school, is fluent.) I reminded him we'd met before—at bullfights. In French, which he used thereafter: "I remember you. *Tiens!*—because of the beard." Immediately infectiously cordial: "I am very glad to see you again." Jacqueline came in. "DC. introduced us at Arles, madame." She had offered her hand and said shyly—as if it were possible one couldn't know—"Jacqueline Picasso."

Masons were building nearby, adding on another wing to the great house to accommodate the ever-swelling welter of "things", and one glimpsed their plaster-dusted bodies, naked to the waist—Picasso thrives in such atmosphere, which seems to repoduce him in images outwards. The "butler" at the door, which opened without ostentation under shaggy great firs, was a stooped, thin man, with a creased, concerned face, rivered with character, and in ordinary brown pants and a tieless shirt, the opposite of jacket or livery. There was a desire to be the naked camera lens, simply inert, record everything ...for was not all germane to Picasso, and what assorting principle could there be? Two dogs: the one an elegant Russian wolfhound, the other a mongrel. ("Each man has in him a 'night' which is unknown to him and is *unknown*, and expressing it is...what art has become"—were the approximate

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words of Cocteau.) A powerful impulse not to *compose*... "I should think I have to do the anti-Picasso," I think wryly, "and damn well keep out of it—and be as neuter as a lens." A regal disorder. Toys (a little wheel that rolled and returned on a looped track which made a kind of cage), packets of photographs from Duncan in New York as yet unopened, and I recall Cocteau telling me of a parcel of a Christ or crucifix which he saw waiting to be unwrapped amid the Picasso clutter for *years*, kaleidoscopes (4)—they were the new types which do not pattern with bits of glass but rearrange the outward world like little distorting telescopes—and Picasso demonstrated them delightedly (to everyone who came in later, in sequence)— in kaleidoscope one saw some Van Gogh sunflowers in a tall vase and Jacqueline Picasso from four or five portraits on the wall fragmented and recomposed (but in one or two of the portraits she was fragmented and recomposed already). Polish discussions of his work, French art newspapers, USA monster-size art edition about him. Handsome Louis XV-looking furniture, also a tubular steel blue-canvas garden chair, a tattered chair, silk split and stuffing coming out; takes an effort of perspective to realize the incongruity and recognize one is not accustomed to seeing tattered furniture in a millionaire's house. Photos Picasso everywhere in every pose —in his rocker reading "Los Picassos de Picasso"; with Dominguin and Bosè. Little probability there isn't a message here: at the bullfight in Arles he was in a Spanish cloak closed by gold frogs and lined in scarlet; he came into the enormous jamboree in his honor in the Palais des Expositions of Nice, many of the greatest musicians in the world (Soviet) there to salute his eightieth birthday, wearing a jacket of black horsehide—that at a little distance glistened like a dinner jacket; following day corduroy worker's coat, but with gold buttons; one doesn't forget that naked chest exposed in the Clouzot film—same chest, monstrously healthy in a man his age, exposed before us now. (Dürrbach is to whisper to me later: "*Everything* is dramatic." I: "But one gets lost.")

There are rooms in the house in which there is nothing whatever, perhaps a telephone standing on the bare floor. It

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gives the note of a place into which the inhabitants haven't even yet moved. The large front rooms are after all (*define* in the Picasso world at your peril) in a rough way classified. Room 1, where we are now and Picasso is joggling Balthazar, son of Dürrbach and his wife Jacqueline de la Baume, in his arms, is the reception room; Room 2 has the paintings; next room beyond, Room 3, making the corner of the California-style house, a long, narrow room with wrought-iron balconies looking, at a distance, to where the Esterel autoroute departs from Cannes to shoot toward Frejus and the truer Provence, holds ceramics, Jacqueline repeated over and again in tiles. (Downstairs a double room and veranda house sculpture.) Jacqueline repeated over and over by the hand undoubtedly guided by—I sense a distinct instinct not to upsum, which all but prevents me ending a sentence.

Hold on—humanly, there is no Mystère Picasso. He is undoubtedly enchanted with Balthazar, this infant of six months much the most important personage among us. He is without question a bright-eyed, inquisitive, small man, startlingly small, without pretension of any sort—in fact, as slowly dawns, miraculously *not present* to himself. That is, unselfconscious in a way which urges reminting of the word. Have you *ever* been listened to with such attention by any human over the age of twenty, not to speak of the great? Why, human conversation is a matter of waiting turn—of giving the pale courtesy of apparent "listening" during the intervals—two rather ill-mated monologues. Pablo Picasso is a wholly different affair; listens, is alive with curiosity at what you are saying—it is true that the next moment his attention has gone somewhere else and you have evaporated (but he returns). Jacqueline comes up to him when he has for a moment been willing to define a splinter of his art reference and touchingly and humorously it is as if some earnest other person had sought to do this when she beams with a radiant, surprised approval and says—"*Je vous adore*, Pablo"—rewarding him by kissing the side of his neck. Picasso, who calls her "tu", thinks this over. "*Ça c'est bien. Ça c'est très bien*," he reflects.

What is it about Pablo Picasso that makes him different

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from everyone else? He is never bored. I check this against bullfights—yes. (Characteristic at a bullfight at Nîmes...the fighters were terrible. PICASSO: They are not very bad. I: If they're bad it's because of the wind. PICASSO: But they are good!—and besides they are bad because of the wind.) Jacqueline is the one who is different. She has something orderly, neat about her when she appears with him abroad—here, barefooted, in slacks, she is terribly sensual. She is *Maja*.

I meet Paloma, Claude. Paloma does not remain very clearly in my mind, through no fault of hers. But three are burnt in my recollection from that afternoon—Picasso, Jacqueline, Claude—with time I find out why.

In the room of the ceramics is a space of floor large enough for the laying out of Dürrbach's and Jacqueline de la Baume's tapestry—actually she, Jacqueline de la Baume, sits at the loom, in a large Provençal house which still belongs to the dead Albert Gleizes, rationalist of Analytical Cubism who would be exactly Picasso's age if he were alive, and Dürrbach does the plans.

DÜRRBACH

What do you think?

PICASSO

Hmm. It's good. Jacqueline, don't we have the original of this one around the house somewhere?

DÜRRBACH

The client is here. He won't buy it. He doesn't like this gray border because he thinks it won't suit the wall he's prepared for it in his New York apartment.

PICASSO

(shrugs). Cut it off. Or fold it under.

DÜRRBACH

Look. (A foot end on the tapestry) The pagination. The organization is centrifugal from the nose here at the center of

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the body parts, but this yellow shovel...look, it's balanced by this extra breadth of gray border on the right. And has to be.

PICASSO

You did it on purpose? Then all right. Weave another one for him. Somebody will buy this one.

His eye fell on a painting of his on the side wall, one of the few in this room mostly filled with the plaques of Jacqueline. He said: "Dürrbach, this would make a tapestry. It's good, no? But the date would have to be left in. You must weave the date in." "Picasso, look here, my blue is exactly your blue from the point of view of color analysis... but look, it's different. It's mine—now that's yours." Nobody had seemed to know where the original of the tapestry was, but a blue was seized in another canvas. (Gleizes writes somewhere: how can critics who are not painters write about art, because in fact they know nothing about it? Later during this afternoon at Notre Dame de Vie Picasso interrupts an art discussion: "But talking about painting is like talking about music apart from the violin, and it is something that happens between the man and the violin when they are together.") I have the strong feeling that that "centrifugal nose" stems from Gleizes, who was Dürrbach's mentor, and not from Picasso...all honor to Dürrbach. Yet it is true that the nose is centered and once this has been pointed out to you you reread the work thus (probably forever). If I am wrestling with these "imponderables" the artists have gone to talking of materials. Picasso roughly chafes the face of one of the new tiles (March), he has made of Jacqueline's dark head, and had baked in the Ramié furnace. And what interests him is neither brush stroke nor head of his wife, seemingly, but process—that new process by which this surface becomes impermeable and, scrub as you wish, Jacqueline cannot be rubbed off. And when later on I gaze with astonishment at a squat, phallic little man in the garden studded all over with tiny grotesque humans bursting out of his flesh and say: "How did it ever come to you to imagine a thing like this!"—he is utterly delighted to be able

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to tell me he did not imagine it at all, but it is a copy of a piece from the "Breeteesh Museum" and imagined by someone a very long time ago—yet what really intrigues him is the way it was got out of the material of the original into this different material here; and he turns from me and to Dürrbach, despite a human generosity which expresses itself in courtesy, in his occupation with this *process*, for of course I am carried out of my depth.

There is a constant play, a constant effusion in the Picasso world—I remind myself of the danger, then the courage, very probably finally the real arrogance, involved in forever seeing everything fresh; the refusal of codification ever of anything. Sterility is after all "knowing"; stasis (very comfortable, as Cocteau points out) comes at the end—the conclusion—of a search. I suddenly overhear—as there has been a commotion in the outer rooms and we are leaving that of the ceramics—Picasso explode with contempt (to Dürrbach and Jacqueline de la Baume, both technicians who must in the final count deal with materials, concretes, as he does himself): "They will never produce anything good there at Sèvres!—because they work serially! What can that lead to? Pof! Pof! Pof!" he is saying scornfully a moment later as we leave the room, "...they fill in the spaces now, trowel in the cement between the stones. But the ancient Peruvians fitted the stones together. The earthquakes came, but the walls are still there. What worth has what is done now? As soon as you learn how to machine-cut stones...everything is finished." These men have a syntax. They are speaking a language which is not ours. Not merely the artisanal language; or that of doing-in-the-moment-of-doing, which is Picasso's "violin participating in the music" and which every creator knows carries his act, by its infinite intricacy and simultaneity, out of the world of static analysis. *Chez* Cocteau, one has learned that these men are speaking not in paradoxes and clevernesses (Cocteau appears to do so in cold print; one must modify him in setting him down in text to prevent that the abstraction of his human tone entirely misrepresent his questing and perplexed spirit) but are talking a language sprung out of Mont-

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parnasse and used by them, within what was at first a closed circle, over more than fifty years. By the suppression of "subject", the refusal of summation, they have overturned the sense of things. I feel I am nibbling on the edges of this world when I am capable of getting what Picasso means when he says to me—perfectly straight-facedly—later of the enormous new mechanical brains or calculating machines: "But they are useless. They can only give you answers." How easy and comforting to take these things for jokes—*boutades!*

Cocteau relates somewhere that when Picasso quits being "Picasso"—for he must rest too—and, for example, paints a head of Paloma or Claude (almost as if he were Renoir), then everyone feels the relaxation, and is happy. Picasso, very probably, too. For *he* is more like that. Only—it isn't "Picasso". Then soon enough the ferocity returns. "He is the most modest of them all," Dürrbach had said. "But he absolutely hates mediocrity of course," he then had added thoughtfully, after a moment's reflection. I realize I am seeing a sunny impressionist's afternoon Picasso... Too much evidence of the ferocity, cruelty, even humanly—occasions of this sprightly little man here—tragic and inhuman termination of his first marriage, for instance, so far as the story is known—for me to think "my" Picasso is entire. Right, the Impressionists to the earlier painters who thought themselves literal realists: "A haystack? But it doesn't exist. A haystack when? Is it the same at midnight as at noon? You, dear old antiquaries, are painting the *idea* of a haystack." Much more than this, Picasso strewed through my whole afternoon the tacks of a far deeper frustration. Shall I strew them for you? 'It is an 'other" who does the painting," he said. ..."Rimbaud talks of creation as the work of the 'other'... and this is true." Seated in his famous rocker in front of his easel with his current work of Jacqueline unfinished before him—"You ask me if it's the work that keeps me young. Yes. I am very fatigued if I don't work. If I do...*tiens*, the other goes there to the canvas and does my work for me, and I could just as well stay here and read a newspaper. When 'he' returns I am refreshed, and not tired." Again: PICASSO. You can never work fast

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enough! You must always work faster, faster! I: To flee beauty? Conventional beauty? That is said of you—I think with a good deal of truth. But what of this? Perhaps it's to overtake the other? PICASSO (after reflection...suddenly): Yes. of course. Touching his bald forehead later on—"It's not here. It has nothing to do with this..."

The commotion in the outer room, that of the heteroclitic array of things, had been occasioned by the arrival of a whole small horde of people—about half a dozen Americans, two of the owners of one of the seven art galleries in New York at that moment showing simultaneously (a fragment of) the perspective of Picasso, and their *passe-partout* and translator, a European woman "of a certain age" but with good solid Picassan bread under her deceitfully simple-looking *haute couture* frock—at the thought one recalls the Picasso paganism, the kind of woman-forms he has chosen to depict and what say of them, through his whole career, his probably a different Mediterranean from their "Riviera" of these who have just arrived, inextricable from his work—the sunburnished half naked potters of pre-Christian (and pre-Platonic) Vallauris. And with these visitors are Claude, Paloma, and Jacqueline's fourteen-year-old daughter, with a dachshund; the animation becomes at once that of a "cocktail party" and Picasso takes it well: gnomishly smiling and making his eyes wide in astonishment, then wriggling into a fawn-colored sports shirt to hide the chest, but getting it on backwards, and it has to be turned around with everbody's help. It is very much the reprieve and diversion of a "Renoir" Picasso of one of these two very children who are here now...and...fortuitously...after Picasso has made everyyone look through the kaleidoscope, greeted everyone with a strangely sincere directness and interest in them, looking up straight into their faces from his small stature, there is the "affair of the *culotte*". This piece of nether underwear is turned up mysteriously in Picasso's atelier. Very much confusion and merriment. Whose can it be? Two different ones of the Manhattan women arrive at—separately—the same retort. "Can't be mine! I don't wear them!" they explode. (I doubt this.) Balthazar has

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vanished somewhere to sleep, but now someone cries that they must have been left behind by Balthazar. Jacqueline Picasso: "But no, they cannot be his! Why?! But they are too white!"

The tour commences. We are led by a bright-eyed, lively little cicerone, who happens to be Pablo Picasso. He is intently interested in our reactions—to the materials, techniques, even sometimes occasions of these Picassos. A tableau is fetched out from the back of a stack and the linoleum cut with a shiny patent leather black has also a scarlet that might be blood run fresh from the goring of a matador—much exclaiming over this! How red the red is! The *glaze* on the tile Jacquelines play its rôle a second time, incites enthusiasm. Picasso is fascinated by our responses; as he had been when offering the kaleidoscopes, watching intently, arms crossed over chest and hands tucked into armpits, as is characteristic. What do we see?

There are several variations on a hound like a coach dog, a white animal with black spots and a wistful expression, simply titled in Spanish "Perro"...this is Picasso's Dalmatian... but the serial subject infesting the house is of course Jacqueline. I have by now afforded her a good deal of amusement by my "quest". She has taken to looking all about her in merry mock search at moments: where is this thing Genius? It takes a good deal of nerve, I tell you, to call a man a genius to his face, though he may well be, and I have preferred to talk with Picasso of bulls and such matters—nor, looking at the paintings, does anybody, including the professionals from New York, including Picasso himself, think to say more than "It's good, no?" or "That scarlet is tremendously scarlet." Picasso's interest, after all, is in *us*; I had noticed of him that whether it is a trinket, a child, an artwork, myself, wherever he ventures he is not in Picasso—yet one feels Picasso never ceases to be Picasso ever, a *toro* of a man. I remember Cocteau saying how on strolls in Montparnasse years ago Picasso made his real harvests, collecting the seemingly least-related objects. What is this house where we are now but the silo of a harvest? "The king of junkmen and a junk dealer King!" Cocteau had exclaimed lyrically, with a kind of irono-admiration.

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Downstairs, the New York art dealer says: "They're going to institute an educational television chain in America, and I've been deputized to ask if we can have a Picasso owl for the emblem or symbol—you know, to open the programs—you know, the sign of *sagesse*..." A lank Bar-Harbor sort of man with a Saint-Tropez tan. He puts the question diffidently. "Why not?" Picasso explodes. "That is very easy. Jacqueline, where are all those owls we have around here?" Massive owls on the fireplace mantel, beaked owls in tin, a strange small hump which in some mysterious manner *suggests* an owl—and Picasso loses himself in comparison and examination of owls.

Since I have confessed myself to Jacqueline, I finally broach it with Picasso. After all, doesn't he specialize in the *in*appropriate? So I throw off the social shackles and say—what is simply the honest truth—"I suppose I'm trying to catch creative genius on the wing." Instead of smiling he replies with another meaning: "That is the only way *to* catch it." He veers, as with the owls, to something else. Easy to say Picasso is not "serious"; but it was serious to make "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon"—from 1907. This braving the horns of the question of art, face to face with the man, in a "social situation," is (in minuscule) a "Demoiselles d'Avignon" or "Guerre et Paix"; certainly unsuitable. For reward, however, I have the witness that genius is fugitive—from one obliged to spend a good deal of time attempting to catch it, though his hand may arabesque more than suits our sense of appropriate solemnity. "Contrariety is the spur—eh? *Peutêtre*?" I think problematically.

Picasso, meanwhile, goes on conducting the show. He is the "animator"—as the French say—and to suppose that he doesn't know it would be naïve. Yet he isn't really self-conscious. He has a natural and instinctive drama sense, as common to his unexpected torso as are his always startling clothes. He is detached from his artifacts, in a most curious way, yet, after all, now that Balthazar is gone, hasn't he center stage? What human asks more? And I catch myself asking what would happen if, drawn on by his open generosity, anyone should contest him *this*? And indeed I have heard what hap-

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pens when, as is naturally so rare, he is opposed—to any degree at all—or if anyone fix him, or even worse his art, with the cold eye of objective scrutiny! (After all, he does not permit this last even to himself.) And I follow with the crowd through this "Picasso Museum", trailing a little bit behind like a shoplifter and filching pointers on Picasso and on art, and not always listening to the lecture. Picasso says—when we all react to his model of the "L'Homme au Mouton"—which stands in the marketplace square of Vallauris and with the chapel facing it is the center of Vallauris—but which in its *moulage* here serves as a clothes rack for his children and is hung and strewn all over with his children's clothes—laughs: "Art requires disrespect!" And when I say "Yes, you can't afford to make a cathedral of it or people won't go in..." he offers me a sudden flash of shrewd smile. Nor does this collector fail to know the money-value of his Picassos. "Be careful. Nothing divine keeps it upright. It is on this base—look. And if you knock it over it will smash. Then what?" he says when one of the children has darted too close to a crazy zigzag of statuary, ballet-pointed on what may be one toe—unconsciously he says this with the suggestion of illimitable possibility of disaster, as if you or I might say—"And if you smashed my Picasso, then what?" A queer, weird woman in dead-white plaster is evidently a child's nurse—and, yes, when the identity of this Dickens personage has been confirmed by the actual baby carriage, which is a real small pram that has been dipped in plaster—Picasso stands back and looks interestedly into our faces: Now what are we going to make of this? The infant who is going to go into this piece of art turns up on the other side of the alcove, which gives out to the veranda where are the famous iron pregnant Picasso goat and other of the heterology, and I am stopped inwardly—outwardly this plaster child is the replica of one of those at Pompeii, cinderized in this rigid agony, but—but this child is dead white—and in time I grasp the image, one of the frozen children I had seen turned up out of the avalanche slope in the Walsertal, in Austria; now Picasso was not there, where *do* these hands get their materials, one *hopes* out of intuition or physical skill.

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I am "touched", of course. Suppress these thoughts, as one might well have suppressed the first sketches of "Demoiselles d' Avignon" in 1907! Even though I know what has pushed me to this—*my* incursion of the barbarities of African art! On the real plane of life, Picasso says with great delight: "Look! This is a piece of pipe from a ceramic furnace at Vallauris. And it is all of things like that." And he raps a lady made of welded junk. Someone spots a round object once a boiler joint and exclaims: "She has an African drum!" Picasso gazes, mystified, squat and stocky, hands under his armpits and arms crossed over his barrel chest. "Yes!" he decides suddenly with enthusiasm, "she has." He puts his cigarette into her iron flat-lipped mouth. He does this in such a manner—at such an angle—that the character of the being is changed, and he recognizes this for he glances very briefly and then says: "And now she looks entirely different." We go back upstairs. I think—strangely—we are all quite tired out. In a moment the Americans are to collect in the reception room and talk in English, like a release from a great strain.

Probably Picasso was the least tired of us all. But he is an assimilator, a reactor, in a constant state of interest in things, like a child, in a world in which—save when "the other" is painting, and this the Rimbaudan *autre* does blindly—value judgment, and the very possibility of value judgment, have been suspended. For the rest of us, there is perhaps a sense of collision...as we follow Picasso about through this heterogeneous maze of the Minotaur. If his heterogeneity were at least single-stranded in a phase of time; but it is not, and schools, epochs and strata of art and of the art of Picasso lie juxtaposed in his house, bearing date of the same week and even same day of composition. One thing I glean: at one moment, just when we are by the object teetered on its "toe", he suddenly says of Claude, fifteen...how much Claude, with his straight lock of hair over one eye, his sullen gypsy look, his square head, is himself—when he came to Paris. And at this a whole album of photos vaults into the mind, and one knows, reviewing Picasso through those years, what secret it is Claude brings to the complex.

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Picasso sinks into his rocker. "*Je travaille. C'est tout,*" he mutters, almost to himself. And somehow I do not tell him I have come to him fractured—like a Cubist schema—by four years of intense study of...of the art which fragmented. Leonardo had, as he, one of the most consummate hands in the entire history of art; and by breaking up the "unities" of life in suppressing the links, smashing the idea world to its concrete fragments of disparate things, opened the way to the illimitable possibilities of finite inventions and—

PICASSO

Painting is manual; it is physical. You find in the materials with your hands. You have a blank piece of canvas. The picture is already there. You scrape for it. It's like digging potatoes.

FIFIELD

Then is the genius in the hand...?

PICASSO

Ah, maybe not even there.

FIFIELD

Then...*ailleurs*? Elsewhere? (A sketching gesture of my hand as if to indicate heaven or far corners)

PICASSO

(bluntly). No! A man is here—where he

FIFIELD

But it is the hand?

PICASSO

Yes. (suddenly) Nijinsky—ah! He would make a gesture like this—same as anybody else—but longer, longer. I don't mean in length. The difference between the good and bad is not the breadth of a hair. A friend of mine copied a Cézanne —exact copy, you could not tell the difference. But the one

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was good and his was bad. Why? An orchestra plays pure notes—"no good." Science. Man goes to the moon, and then? Man does not change, always the same, always the same amount of the good and the bad, like a horse or a bull in the field—and that is why there is no progress, and can't be. I hate to end things, you know, when I paint. How can anyone end anything?

FIFIELD

I share your feelings.

PICASSO

A hundred painters are better than one—than any *one*, given that they are units in themselves. But there is no multiplication in human beings... All the savants since—and no explanation of Michelangelo.

FIFIELD

But surely Michelangelo was this? (extending my two hands)

PICASSO

Peut-être. Oui. Oui, peut-être ça. Yes. Maybe. Yes, maybe that. But who knows?

FIFIELD

Then maybe genius is who-knows-where? Your hand, for instance. What authorizes us, aside from the mere stage of our present psychological knowledge now, to say its propulsion is your "subconscious"—your—Another culture would have said it is a somewhat puckish God, or Pan—

PICASSO

(abrupt grunt, but with a flick of smile; these are plainly pastures where the Minotaur will not venture). The savants will never create one creator. Those in there (smiles) they are on vacation, so they think I am too. I am never on vacation. I work. ("*Je travaille. C'est tout.*") (He is waiting—with really

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an enormous patience, considering—for us all to clear out: that he may work. And shortly we go.)

Why is Picasso called protean—to the extent that his creativity has been likened to that of God Himself? Because he has protean goals? Or rather because he has no goals? Upon reflection, it is clear the result would be the same: an unlimiting intention, or no intention whatever.

On the *place* of Mougins, Jacqueline de la Baume tells me: "He was very chic with us. It seems everything passes by, and his attention flits off to other things. But he took the trouble to sell the tapestry—to one of those Americans there, and he waived his share."

Picasso is loquacious but not theoretical. He does not skirt theory as a mystic might who is afraid to know—theory is overtaken by all the concrete elements that make it up. He hasn't time to get to summations, or else he is too *here* to take the savant's eye view. Sometimes he is pensively silent—crinkling his forehead, squinting his eyes—uttering a "oui"—a "oui"...he absorbs, ingurgitates. Humble interrogator, I do not serve him as a mere springboard—he offers me no royal consideration, which would have a grain or condescension in it very un-Picassan—I fascinate him (transiently), happening to be human. And yet I would insist I am probably a human "object" for him—and that he participates in me, which he remarkably does, without leaving himself. This is, finally, the complaint of his friends. One has tended to think him capricious—Orpheus-piper marshaling behind him the data and minutiae, arrogant. *Capra:* goat, bounding, virile, inquisitive. It is true he has been freed by a gift divine or material (we do not know) as is the lightning, and by that extraordinary Montparnasse revolution of Expressionism in contemporary art; by these combined conditions liberated to do just as he wants. Had he not been Andalusian (I startle awake in the night of that day to realize I have forgotten to ask him if he is Andalusian) he might have perished of ennui and frustra-

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tion—the Doris-Duke syndrome. I had gone to him expecting to find him suffering from lack of limitations. Art lost in the void. Too much freedom. The *nothing*ness of everything. No. He retains the vivid interestedness of a child.

Finally I had tried to draw him out on Leonardo, the linkages and similarities binding these two men closer it might be claimed than either is bound to any other artist ("If you follow rules you will never get to the beginning of anything."—Leonardo da Vinci.) But one draws blanks just where the average practitioner would probably be self-intrigued; that is all distant for Picasso, who is in the immediacies.

You cannot see Claude Picasso in a blue cotton shirt with cuffs too long, carelessly open, barefoot, with his great black smoldering eyes, and never once smiling, without knowing here you have—far more than in the little old man—Pablo Picasso of the 1900–1910 periods. Picasso may have invented Jacqueline—or chosen her—she is in his work long before he knew her—all the same, the enormous sensuality and young force in the "late Picasso" stem from her: from Jacqueline: at the scene of the origination of these works, this is undeniable. *A triumvirate.* Being "Picasso".

One of the real cognoscente, who has many Picassos, has told me that finally it will be Braque who will break to the top. Will diversity triumph, or singleness? That judgment we shall not know for it will come after our time. But probably it will be the judgment on an epoch. And very likely it will fluctuate from age to age. The inconstant "good".

—WILLIAM FIFIELD

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MONET'S SUNRISE

Monet's Sunrise
the boats
to illustrate
the drift of light, shifting
clouds

a line of the three, a curve
is more the imagination
a slight curve a number
to settle men, compact
there are two in the first, heel

point of obliqueness

one sitting one standing
with its shadows, another descent

a different cast motion
complex we can
savor it, coming
—in not much time to
brushstrokes

in water

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APR. 7 '64

twig stick
A line of trees hard
branches above the roofs
the sea fog
press backward, down to water

every way slightly rocked

paths infinite
3 dimensions
direction of the sun
past the sight

emanate
in time dense, travel
around the sap
risen
the wind blows

—LARRY EIGNER

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CATULLUS 70

Nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle
quam mihi, non si se Iuppiter ipse petat.
dicit: sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti
in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua.

CATULLUS 72

Dicebas quondam solum te nosse Catullum,
Lesbia, nec prae me velle tenere Iovem.
dilexi tum te non tantum ut vulgos amicam,
sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos.
nunc te cognovi: quare etsi impensius uror,
multo mi tamen es vilior et levior.
qui potis est? inquis. quod amantem iniuria talis
cogit amare magis, sed bene velle minus.

CATULLUS 73

Desine de quoquam quicquam bene velle mereri
aut aliquem fieri posse putare oium.
omnia sunt ingrata, nihil fecisse benigne;
immo etiam taedet, taedet obestque magis:
ut mihi, quem nemo gravius nec acerbius urget,
quam modo qui me unum atque unicum amicum habuit.

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CATULLUS 70 (*Nulli se dicit*)

Newly say dickered my love air my own would marry me all
whom but me, none see say Jupiter if she petted.
Dickered: said my love air could be o could dickered a man
too
in wind o wet rapid a scribble reported in water.

CATULLUS 72 (*Dicebas quondam*)

Decay bars one time, 'solely to know, see Catullus,'
Lesbia, comparing well and then turning down Jove.
The likes of you then unknown to vulgar *as it may come*,
so father would knot his sons, deal (league with) his sons-in-
law.
Now that I've known you: quarry I'd seize impends its own
fire or
mulled in my mind it's velleity or levity.
'Keep up this zest and kiss'? Could a man timed in injuries
tally,
cog the ah marring maggots, say by now 'we love,' mean us?

CATULLUS 73 (*Desine de quoquam*)

Day, see no day – choke, qualm, quick qualm – benevolence,
merit are
out – all a whim – fear airing perhaps some few are pious.
All men are soon ungrateful, no will focuses benignant;
the more tied to them more tired (tired) with a best of mag-
gots:
with me here who cannot grow wise knowing nor curb his
bitterness, urged
qualm mode o quick my one – who that quick knew the
one me – gone become habit.

—LOUIS ZUKOFSKY

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Astride
the Cabot
fault,

one leg upon the ocean one leg
upon the westward drifting continent,

to build out of sound the wall
of a city,

the earth
rushing westward 2'
each 100
years, 300 years past
500 years
since Cabot, stretching
the Ocean, the earth

going NNW, course due
W from north of the
Azores, St Martin's
Land,

the division
increasing yet the waters
of the Atlantic
lap the shore, the history
of the nation rushing to melt
in the Mongolian ice, to arrive
at Frances Rose-Troup Land, novoye

Sibersky
slovo,

the Wall
to arise from the river, the Diorite Stone
to be lopped off the Left Shoulder

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7 years & you cld carry cinders in yr hand
for what the country was worth broken
on the body
on the wheel of a new
body
a new social body
he was broken
on the wheel his measure
was broken Winthrop's
vision was broken he has broken the country
had walked away
and the language
has belonged to trade or the English
ever since until now once more JW
can be said to be able
to be listened to: wanax
the High governor
of Massachusetts John
wanax who imagined
that men
cared
for what kind of world
they chose to
live in
and came here seeking
the possibility: Good News
can come
from Canaan

—CHARLES OLSON

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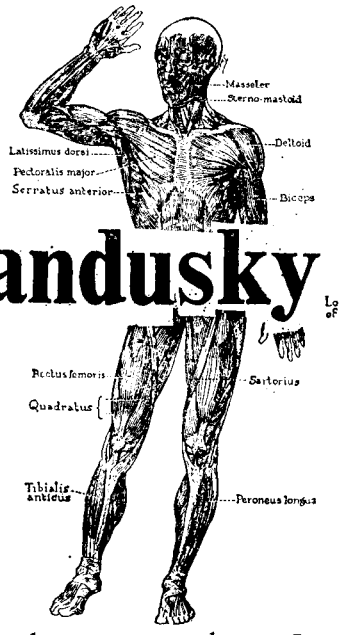
The Great Sandusky



Stanley Elkin

"The Great Sandusky" was a hard man to get to know. Indeed, getting to meet him was my first campaign. We were both strong men of the world. He would help me. That he was in the city was common knowledge to all the regulars in the gym. I had seen a feature article on him in the paper. It said he lived now in a hotel near the river. I would write him. Of course. The Great Sandusky. Of course!

I let myself into the gymnasium office and took three sheets of stationery.

I wrote:

The Great Sandusky
Riverside Hotel
2nd and Steamboat Streets
St. Louis, Missouri

Dear Sir,

I am an admirer of yours. Not simply because of your feats (which no man could gainsay), but because I am a strong man myself and

Title page by Brian Bernhard

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know what effort was involved in the accomplishment of those feats. I should like very much to meet with you in order to discuss your achievements and to talk over with an expert certain plans of my own. Please arrange whatever appointment would be convenient to you. May I close by saluting a pioneer in strength and by remaining yours very truly, etc., etc.

I wrote it four times until it was awkward and stiff enough. Then I signed the letter and addressed the envelope. At the last moment I had an idea that would demonstrate my earnestness. I hunted around in the office until I found a couple of nails. These I bent and put into the envelope with the letter.

I supposed I would hear from him within two days. What the hell, an old man, out of condition, in a lousy waterfront hotel. He would answer as soon as he got the letter. He would go downstairs and beg a few sheets of hotel stationery (kept for official business) from the night clerk and painstakingly scratch out a reply. He didn't. I waited. I heard nothing. On the fourth day I wrote again:

Dear Sandusky,

Perhaps you thought my last letter insincere, the work of a crank, or the teasing joke of a jealous man. I assure you neither assumption fits the case. I have the greatest respect for your feats. I know of your fabulous cow lift. A picture of you pulling the locomotive is in my wallet at this moment next to my mother's own and I should like to assure myself that a life given over to the cultivation of strength reaps rewards in later age commensurate with the Spartan, with the Herculean *efforts necessary to develop that strength.*

"I am a professional myself, sir," I finished and signed the letter.

Instead of two nails I enclosed a half inch spike which I had paid a professional machinist to heat and bend for me. This time Sandusky would certainly answer. When he didn't I was more surprised than hurt. Then it occurred to me that, after all, he was now an old man. Perhaps he was dead. I called his hotel.

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"May I speak to 'The Great Sandusky?'"

"He ain't in."

"Please, it's important."

"There's no phones in the room."

"I don't give a damn what you pay the stinking cops to keep your license. I'll see to it the Fire Chief, Chief Lesbeth, hears about all those violations and you'll be out of there so fast your head will spin. Get Sandusky."

"Who is this?"

"It's Jimmy Boswell that's who it is."

"Just a minute. I'll see if he's come back."

He went away.

"Hey Boswell. The old man won't speak to you. Says to tell you the spike is a cheap trick, that any jackass with reasonable force could bend a friggin spike."

He hung up.

So, I thought. He had hubris, the old man. So much the better. The great are touchy folk. They are goosey. The goosey great. I give it to them. It is a free world, right?

I wrote a third letter:

My dear Sandusky, I began, *I appreciate your reluctance to meet with outsiders, with the jackals who feed off the greatness of others. Let me be frank. I read the feature about you in the papers. It was disgusting. If I were a lawyer I would advise a suit. It made your efforts appear comical. The reporter's insistence on your emphasis on the sub-scale of ordinary Greeks was a deliberate attempt to offset scientific observations by making them appear hobby-horsy. To provide amusement for weak, fat-ridden, office workers. What does an outsider know? Has he sweated under the strain of a benchlift, has he felt the pull of the jerk-and-press, the thrill of the curl, the backhoist, the arm wrenching, shoulder wrecking agony of the dead lift? I am a strong man, Sandusky, and I have a legitimate historical interest in your training. If bending half inch spikes is labor for a child then what is this?*

I enclosed a twisted spike of an inch's thickness.

I received no reply but in the mail three days later was a

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package for me. In it was the spike. Sandusky had straightened it.

In a hardware store I bought two pounds of iron filings. I put them in a box and sent them to Sandusky.

Two days later there was a post card addressed to me in the gym office. On the front was a picture of a sunset over some resort hotel in the east. On the back was one word: "Come."

I went to Sandusky's hotel that same night. It was very ratty. I stepped into the single narrow elevator. The numerals on the control buttons were smudges. Behind a clouded glass at the rear of the elevator was a faded picture of a rooster. "Good Morning!" it crowed. "Have Breakfast in the Wake-Up Room!" Beneath it a sign warned, "Room service is discontinued after midnight. "Another sign said "Laneur Hospitality is World Famous. A Laneur Guest is an Important Person." Under this someone had written "Fuck you." I read the inspection certificate. There was some very tiny print and seals and stamps and then the legend: "This elevator is authorized to carry no more than nine hundred (900) lbs. This elevator was last inspected on *April 10, 1939*. An illegible signature followed this. I looked at the heavy, raised brass OTIS medallion on the clumsy control at the front of the elevator. The control itself looked like something you drove a trolley with. I pulled the handle back and forth but nothing happened. The thick, important looking handle slid uselessly to and fro in the wide slot.

The elevator moved up slowly to Sandusky's floor. The cock crowed good morning. Room service warned. Laneur boasted. Guests retaliated. Authority regulated. It was a babble of silent, hopeless irrelevancy. Inauspicious, I thought. Inauspicious.

I got off at Sandusky's floor and trod the worn carpets to Sandusky's door. The corridors smelled like a men's room in a railroad station. What a masculine smell, I thought. I knocked on Sandusky's door.

There was something like a nervous, surprised little movement behind the door but no one answered. I knocked again.

"Who's that?" a voice said.

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I knocked.

"Who's that I said."

"It's Big Boswell," I answered powerfully.

"No," the voice said, "go away."

"Sandusky, is that you?"

"Go away I said."

"I was invited. It's Giant Jim. I must see you."

"No," the voice said. "Go away. Leave me alone."

"You invited me, Sandusky. It's Giant Jim Big Boswell. I have to talk to you."

"Leave me alone I said. Go away."

"Is that you, 'Great'?"

"No."

"It is. I've come miles. From Idaho where I train. Where I carry trees up mountains to train. Let me in."

"No I said."

"All right, Sandusky, I've had enough. You saw what I did to that spike. How much easier it would be for me to do the same thing to this door. I warn you."

"Listen, you get out of here. I don't have to see anybody."

"All right, Sandusky. I warned you. Now I'm going to break your door. I'll make wood shavings out of it. You could put them on a floor in a butcher shop."

"Stop," the voice said. "I'll open the door."

The door opened.

"Sandusky?"

"Come inside."

"The Great Sandusky?"

"Don't make bad jokes. Come inside."

There was a mistake. In his pictures Sandusky was a huge man with a great shining massive skull, the famous "battering ram." He was bulky rather than muscular, meaty, red-fleshed, faintly Tartar, a circus poster strong man in leopard skinned *deshabille*, one furred strap tight across the wide and straining shoulder. He was fearful even in the photographs, like some strange wet animal. On a circus poster the man before me might have looked like the company's advance man, nothing more. He was shorter than Sandusky could possibly have

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been and if his appearance suggested that he had ever been in athletics it was because he looked so much like a vaguely seedy high school basketball coach who had known his share of point shavers, gamblers and hoods. A baggy shark-skinned business suit gave him the careless, spilled soup look of the insider, the man who breaks training. His fingers had the mustardy nicotine blotches of the revolutionary and, indeed, against the background of his hotel he looked in fact like some out of date anarchist.

We looked at each other narrowly for a moment and then the man, smiling, offered me his hand. "It's a trick," I thought immediately. This was a hand which had crushed rocks. For all its shabby appearance of dis-use and, even, disease, it would attempt to crush my own. He would break my fingers, would he? "All right," I thought, "we'll see." Trying to appear as casual as he I let him have my hand. As soon as we touched I braced and squeezed first. I felt no resistance and pressed the hand as I would a sponge. He pulled his arm away and I saw that I had made a mistake.

"Do you want to kill me? Is that the way you show your respect?"

"I'm sorry," I said awkwardly. "I was trying to impress you."

"You would impress me more if you behaved yourself."

"I'm sorry," I said. "Please," I said, "forgive me."

Sandusky, if the little man *was* Sandusky, began backing away from me and rubbing his hand. I apologized again. I begged his pardon. He sat on the edge of his unmade bed.

"I made a mistake," I said.

"All right," he said, "forget it."

"It was stupid of me. I'm sorry."

I apologized some more. I saw it gave him courage.

"Three years ago," he said at last, "I would have thrown you through the wall for that."

"Yes," I said.

"I would have torn off your head."

"Yes," I said. "Certainly you would have."

"I had a terrible temper."

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"I heard that."

"I was a wild man of Borneo in a sideshow when I was a young man and they had to let me go because I was so realistic."

"I read that somewhere," I said.

"I once broke a man's back who got too close to my cage."

"Didn't the police..."

"The rube called me a fake and threw peanuts. What police? What could they do, put handcuffs on me? *Hand*cuffs?"

"They would have been like so much string," I said.

"Yeah, string," he said. "Crap, what does it mean? You see what happens to a man?" He held up his hand.

"I'm sorry," I said again.

He ignored me.

"*Did you think Sandusky would be like this?*" he asked. "I was hiding out. I don't know how that reporter found me. How do they know those things? He used old pictures. I made him do that. You know what surprises me most?" He looked up at me. "Sit down." I thanked him and looked around. I noticed for the first time that except for the bed and a chest of drawers there was no furniture in the room. I had to sit on the edge of the bed with Sandusky. I sat carefully, prissily. Only roommates plop down on each other's beds. A gentleman uses another man's bed as he would another man's car. It is highly personal machinery.

"What surprises me most is the pain," Sandusky said. "As an athlete yourself you know that training is an accommodation to pain. That's all. A champion is a man who has mastered pain. You'd think my training would have accustomed me to it." He lowered his voice. "They want to throw me out of the hotel. I holler. At night. I holler."

"Have you been sick?" I said.

"Sick? Hah, what would you know about it?"

"I'm sorry," I said.

"It's my fucking constitution. With my trouble any other man would have been dead in eight months. Me? Three years now and God knows how long to go."

I could not really believe in Sandusky's illness.

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"Why don't you kill yourself?" I suggested.

"Don't be fresh," he snapped. "Say, you've got a lot of nerve going around telling people to kill themselves." He considered me for a moment. "Did you really do that?" he asked.

"Do what?"

"That thing. The spike. Or was it a trick?"

"It wasn't a trick," I said.

He shook his head in soft, sad wonder. "You're the strongest," he said. "You got any money for an old champion?" he asked plaintively.

No, I thought. No. He said "champeen." He was mocking me.

"Have you got any scrap-books?" I asked.

"What's that?"

"Scrap-books. Pictures of yourself from the old days."

"Say, what's the matter with you? Are you straight?"

"Please," I said. "I'd like you to show me your scrap-books."

Sandusky laughed crudely. "Why?" he asked.

"I'm a professional," I said. "It's scientific."

I had the idea when he told me about making the reporter use old photographs. There must be a scrap-book. That would be the thing. A guided tour. History is rare. It happens once. Who sits under the apple tree with Newton? All right, for the sake of argument, you're Moses' friend. But when he climbs Mt. Sinai he climbs alone. A tourist sees the mountain. Some raggedy Arab leads him up and shows him a piece of broken stone. But it's not the same thing. What do *places* mean? *Tombs? Relics?* It's people in the moment *before* history happens. That's what counts. So if Sandusky had a scrap-book it was not enough just to see it. I had to sit by while *he* turned the pages. Ersatz? Certainly. Who says no? But I must always go as close as I can go, sidling up to the fearful edge of someone else like a man with vertigo. I tell you there is a sort of shame for me in not being one of the trinity, chagrin in not being even a twin. I am just Boswell the Big. What a burden for a strong man. In the presence even of Sandusky I

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felt a sort of awe. Even an old success, a past, provocative as a scent, could hold me.

"So you're a pro, what difference does that make? What can you learn from photographs?" Sandusky asked.

"That's not it," I said. "*Please.*"

He threw up his hands. Under his sleeves, I knew, the flesh around his upper arms hung slackly, like an old woman's on a bus. "I keep a few pictures," he said. He seemed apologetic. "Loose," he explained. "There's nothing you could call a scrap-book." He went to the chest of drawers and bent down.

"He keeps them in the bottom drawer," I thought, "where it's uncomfortable for him to get at them. He's humble."

Having to stoop like that was obviously uncomfortable for him. I stood to help him. He heard me move and looked back over his shoulder impatiently. "I can still pull out a damned drawer," he said.

"Of course," I said. "I was just stretching."

He scooped out a pile of pictures from beneath some papers —certificates and documents—and ran his hand over them rapidly, like a man in a gin rummy game looking through the discard pile. He picked out some pictures and brushed the rest swiftly backwards toward the dark corner of the drawer. I saw the face of a woman on some of them—in my business one learns to look quickly—and wished that I might be able to look at those. (History is gossip, too, right? What stocks did Sandusky buy? Who was the beneficiary of those policies?) He picked up what was left and brought them back to the bed.

"These are just some poses," he said shyly. "They're corny, but you can get an idea." I took the photographs from him and looked at them carefully and slowly. "Of course, I was pretty young when these were taken. A kid. Younger than you are probably," he said. "I was sort of a model in those days. That's how I broke into the game." As I looked at the pictures of Sandusky in his prime, of a near nude Sandusky in postures of incredible stress, I was struck not so much by the contrast between the vigorous body of the young man and the collapsing presence sitting next to me, as by the complete lack of self-consciousness in the face of the younger man. There

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was an absorption so intense it might almost have been indifference. The man in the photographs wallowed in the sense of his body. A professional indeed. He was like a stage magician feigning surprise at the bunch of flowers suddenly appearing in his hand. I stared at the photographs, trying to get inside not his body, but the *achievement* of his body, the historic *occasion* of his body. I must have embarrassed Sandusky. "They're poses," he said again.

"Yes," I said hoarsely, "I know. Poses."

I looked still more closely at the pictures. I examined them like a detective looking for clues. That's what I was. A detective. I searched for the essence of Sandusky's greatness. The achievement of man into meat. He had been like Christ, Sandusky. I saw that his shyness now was no swift accident, no result of the mere, though sudden, confrontation of the discrepancy between youth and age, wholeness and infirmity. It was there then. In the photographs. What I had mistaken for self-absorption, for pride, was a thorough selflessness. Sandusky, if he had ever existed, had disappeared behind that body, behind those eyes. His achievement was a self-sacrifice, not like my petty push-ups in the gym, a means to an end. Sandusky's were a means to *the* end. Remember, you must die. The corpse. The corpse. The body. The body. Sandusky remembered.

There was one photograph of Sandusky's great, flexed right arm. In profile Sandusky gazed down at the bicep, transfixed. In another he stood with his fists on his hips. Where the elbows crooked, meaty slabs of muscle seemed to spill from the Niagra of his upper arms down into his forearms. His thumbs shoved against his rib-cage, swelling his chest. In another he posed, flatfooted, his toes lost, melted together in the overexposed photograph that washed his body in a frightening light like the brightness of a saint in a vision, the fingers of one hand splayed, rigid as steel tubes. His other hand grappled his wrist. I had the odd feeling that were he to let go he would have flown apart, the muscles flying outward from the center like shrapnel. This same quality of desperate containment pervaded all the photographs. Even in the pic-

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tures that showed Sandusky lifting heavy weights, he seemed not so much to be lifting them as burdened by them. In one his arms thrust defensively upward toward a huge barbell. He squatted beneath the heavy weight obscenely, his knees spread wide and as high as his chest. His face was an agony, a passion of tears and pain, his breath heavy balls that threatened to pierce his cheeks, like the representation of Zephyrus in classic paintings. He seemed, lifting the weight, caught in some final humiliation. There were many such pictures. Another showed him upright, the weight high over his head. Queerly, he seemed suspended from it. In the last photograph he actually *was* suspended. He hung in a device, his arms flung back across a horizontal bar, his shoulders wide as planks under the tremendous pressure. Wound about his entire body were thick chains from which, pendulant as gigantic metal fruit, were suspended huge weights like railroad wheels. "Ah, I thought. "Ah."

Sandusky looked over my shoulder. I heard his thick breath. "They're poses," he said. "When I was a kid."

"Of course," I said.

"The weights came later. Stunts," he said scornfully.

"Heroic feats," I said.

"Stunts. Lousy stunts. I liked the body building—the training—that was good. You can see in the pictures. After I started doing the stunts I got fat, thick. I lost my definition."

"You never had any, Sandusky," I thought. "That was your triumph."

"That's what made you the Great Sandusky," I said.

"Oh, that. You want a laugh? Here, look at these." He handed me two photographs I had not seen. One was of the lower part of his body, his waist and legs. The other was of everything above the waist.

I looked at the photographs and then at Sandusky. "Well?" I said.

"Don't you get it?" he said. "Don't you get it?"

I shrugged.

"Lower Sandusky," he said, pointing to the picture of his legs. Then, touching the other photograph, "*Upper* Sandusky!

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The town in Ohio! Get it!" He handed me a full length portrait of himself.

"Greater Sandusky?" I said.

"Yeah," he laughed, "yeah, yeah, *Greater Sandusky*!" He clapped me on the back. He laughed and laughed. "*Greater Sandusky*," he wheezed through his laughter.

"Greater Sandusky," I laughed with him. "Greater Sandusky! Greater Sandusky! Yeah. Yeah."

"Yeah," he said.

"*Greatest* Sandusky!" I roared, putting all three pictures in a pile.

"Yeah," he laughed, "*Greatest* Sandusky."

Sandusky fell back on the bed, one arm flung heavily across his forehead. The other he raised weakly to his lips trying to contain his laughter. He looked like someone who knew he would be sick, and the sight of him beside me, beneath me, the strong man wrestled to his bed by laughter, made me laugh more. "You'd have had to have been there," I kept thinking, already trying to explain to someone else afterwards what it had been like. "You'd have had to have been there." I tried to say "Greatest Sandusky" again to keep the joke going. Sandusky saw me and shook his head in warning. He took his hand away from his lips long enough to say "Do-o-n't. Doannt. Don't. No. D-dd-doonnnt."

I was made ruthless by my laughter. "*Greatest* Sandusky," I said.

He giggled.

"Greatest *Sandusky*," I said.

Sandusky roared.

"*Greatest Sandusky!*" I yelled at him!

He collapsed in laughter, the water rushing from his eyes. Startled, I saw that he looked like the Sandusky of old, the Sandusky of the photographs, his cheeks blown out in a rage of pain, his eyes drowned in his effort's flood. Sandusky beneath the Barbell, beneath the world's gross weight, who held that weight from the ground, from touching the ground, who was all we had between it and us. Sandusky's face, its urgent effort, angered me. I gazed down and wondered if it

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was possible to kill a man by making him laugh.

"Sandusky," I yelled, screaming to make him hear me, "Sandusky, why does a strong man wear a jock?"

"D-d-do-on-nnt. Doannt."

"To hold his bells up."

"D-o-o-n't. Ple-plee—leeze."

"Mr. Sandusky, how is a strong man like a man who serves food in a restaurant?"

"D-on't."

"They're both *weight*ers!"

He laughed, strangling, but I saw he was regaining control. It was too bad, I thought. "If you can't join 'em, kill 'em." The new Boswell. Boswell, the Bad. Aesthetically, it was a pity. I could imagine Sandusky dead, and calling the police myself to report it, and their coming, and finding Sandusky's corpse. The Corpse of Sandusky, the heroic mold, all muscles and laughs; "Of course, gentlemen, he died out of his prime, but the essential materials are still there," I would tell them, lifting a loose flap of skin and pulling it taut. "We could take him to a taxidermist and have him stuffed. It's what *he* would want." I would explain to the Inspector that I had told him a joke and he had died. But it was too late. Already Sandusky was sitting up, his feet over the edge of the bed. He looked like someone who might wake with a hangover. He was disreputable, torn, and seemed as seedy as he had when I had first come in.

"That was a good laugh," he said stupidly. He smiled, remembering it.

"Yes," I said.

"It's been years since I had a laugh like that."

"It's good for you to laugh like that once in a while. It clears the system," I said.

"Well sure," he said, "I know. When I was developing the body I used to make it a habit to read the joke books. It's a very good lung exercise."

"Is that a fact?" I said. When he said "*the* body" I felt another twinge of anger. He had confirmed again the selflessness of his life's effort. I couldn't forget that.

"I'm a little tired now," he said apologetically.

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"Sure," I said, "I'll get out of here."

"Maybe you could come back another time. I enjoyed talking to you."

"Sure," I said.

I got up.

"Wait a minute," he said. He came over to me. "You might as well take one of these." He handed me one of his "poses."

"Oh," I said, "I couldn't."

"Sure," he said. "What the hell." He looked at me carefully. Then, to my surprise, he reached out and touched me. He put his hands on my arms, and stooping, slid his palm down my thighs. On his hands and knees he held my calf muscle, molding it almost. "Say," he said, looking up at me, "that's all right." He straightened up. "You got any pictures of the body? I'd like to see those calves."

"Gee, I'm sorry, Mr. Sandusky, my photographer promised he'd have some ready for me yesterday, but he ran out of the high gloss paper we use."

"Oh," he said, "I see."

"Some should be coming in soon, though," I said. "I could let you have a chest and the legs and thighs, of course, and a neck that I'm very proud of. I saw the neck proofs yesterday when I went to the shop and I think they're terrific."

"I'd like to see them," he said. "The neck was always one of my weak spots as you probably saw."

"No," I said, "you had a distinguished neck."

"Well, it was *scrawny*," he said, lowering his voice. "I was susceptible to sore throats and I could never exercise it the way I should have."

"The way it deserved," I said.

"Yeah," he said, "the way it deserved."

"Well," I said, shoving out my hand, "thanks for everything."

"My pleasure," he said.

I held up the photograph he had given me and grinned.

"Forget it," he said, "my pleasure."

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CATACOMBS

I

This bed is all hay and honey,
fragrant with semen;
yet it put a crimp in Anita's spine.
At sunrise, she sees red,
bitching about her bruises from the stove,
a hand on the back of her loose
house dress, as if she were pregnant.
That jolts me, Fathers, sorry:
I don't want an heir;
not I, who drag my ox
of blood from the kitchen stoop into fog,
but step on eggshells
delicately, as I near a blue ruin of grass.
When I enter a zone of ash,
acorns rot into the puny huts
of peasants rinsed and burnt in oil.
I am crammed with dead meat.

What joy? I'd felt it rise in red drops
on a sweet hedge outside.
Whenever I try to bleed it now,
the raspberries wilt in a grave mist.
I, in my own pit,
reduce my drink with milk, as stone
lies of a newscast sulk in my cup.
Past its hot air,
I see our ambassador, natty in beetle's
tails, spewing crude oil:
Cuba refined his taste.
'The club's let a kike in,' he cries;
the poor conceive in sin,
what we need is no children.'

Who can sweep this away?

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I ask you, Fathers, you in the dumps
near Minsk,
whose old stones like yahrtzeit
candles the panzers sliced.
For even if only a wet
wick connects our soft or stiff halves,
I need what you had,
who bit off a laugh when dogs,
sniffing the fur of yiddish, burst from saloons.
Black as tailors
(your patrimony a jaw full of pins),
your souls crept
to the shitty end of the stick,
cracked in our family
tree. You pined away to prayers at nightfall
if a howl of killers in their slops
left the police at ease. Yet,
after it all,
picking excelsior off
a pair of wings, you blessed the day.
Bless me, Fathers.
My elders can't: if they pronounce
a curse on Columbus,
television plugs a hole in their heads.
You also knelt on a target? Yes,
I know. Still, I can't see you
creamed on stupor:
minds and panes sealed,
a mumbling lip in a stove.
Come from the throats of trees,
come as you were;
I call you, chiggers and flies on your scalps,
mild beaks snagged on beards:
a page from the Bible.

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2

I mean I'm afraid. I fear
hair like the fur on a tennis ball,
short eyes: these blue
Prussians in mufti on Park Avenue.
(So nice really when you get to know them!)
High up, each one
spins on a swivel chair to drill
a well a mile deep
into the world's brittle diamond:
millions of us die.
But who stands on my right hand,
up from a vault of tea-things below
a closet heaped with shoes, the blue suede
lungs of miners?
The plutocrat blabs in my ears:
'Think of me as dead, a body embalmed with
ink
as green as my loot,
my coffin a weight off your mind.
Raise a hero in my memory.'

Then, I see gliding
on the blind white heat of each eye
the Swan of West Point,
his cloth cap a griddle of braid
I could blister on.
His sweat flies like fat; he won't
cool off between kills,
and the metal hooves of his men
wear the bland grass to a frazzle.
I dream they flock out of Father Teller's
spooky eyebrows, coming to hunt
a child I'd let go.
Running, I hide him
under a minute or two of sleep,
in canefields in Cuba, beneath a raspberry.

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I board him with flies,
waterbugs, a Negro janitor
living by the coal bin of a cave
as dank as a slaver.

3

No place is safe. I can't sit still or keep going.

I stoop to a window
screen full of empty holes.
A black thread of fog
pierces each eye of my mood.
Nothing rubs me raw
but bits of what I was once. I think
my cheek will break if even
a breath, making a hairpin turn in this air,
stings my face.
I listen to a mean lost pulse: Animals
milling around
a root in my breast
cramp my blood.

4

Who'll wring me out of this
rainy season? My wings are sopping;
I've slung them across
the arms of a tub.

I drip and I clot.
Fathers of spilt milk,
how can I mop up this mess?
Tie my vein. Tell me the body of man,

a pouch of wit and milk,
will not run empty,
shriveling in a ditch.
Tell me, rather, I'll rise

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like a cake in the oven.
You, under your pond of dust,
deeper even than the whitest roots
and slugs, tell me the time

I so desire. Then,
breaking in between the green ribs
of a raspberry bush,
a piece of light in my wife's mouth,

the sun is new, the spirit
moves me, Fathers, and the clear air,
once and for all,
jumps with children in a ring.

—LEWIS MEYERS

MEDITATION ON OLAI AND PETE BLY

The long waves boom in the naked Norwegian caves,
Men with gray hair come, men
Like Polynesians, their long hair is like bark falling from a waterfall,
And women in sod huts, beneath horse blankets,
Something stifling, something wee, something living in a well.

Something living in a wall, forgotten, my grandfather
Driving horses down the slats of the plaster,
With an indecision, a sloth, an affection for fish –
Something on foot on the uncut plains, something wandering,
Like a small dog, or a fenceline open on both ends.

—ROBERT BLY

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TOURIST CABINS IN WINTER

Now shut, closed, taken their life deeply back into themselves,
Looking out from the cliff over the barren oneness of the sea—
Those cabins that have served as the boards of a stage
Where so many times the same scene has been reenacted,
The grandiloquence and mountings in that hired space
To which the pursuit of human life attaches so much importance,
Now shut, bolted, locked, shuttered, boarded-up.
Presenting only four bare walls to the outside, deserted above the sea,
Inside dwell the spirits of the scenes laid there—
Sitting in dressing gown with their knees crossed over coffee at the table
Smiling wryly at the number and similarity of their likenesses;
They are so thin and have so little body in feeling to them
That they live in the chinks between the spaces—
Where they take up nothing of the room for the future.
Lolling about in chairs, reclining in wrappers on the bed,
Bored with a time in the past that has left them what they are,
They are the shapes of the contacts their life has with memory;
The touch of a lamp, a glass of water, moving a chair,
A meal, a look at themselves in the mirror, looking out the window:
So many of them in so small a space, they drown
Sink, fuse, melt in each other, exchange one part for another;
An arm for a bum, a smile for a leg, tears for a touch,
Shame for submitting, coyness for a pocketbook, a flower for a breast.
By that anonymous intercourse the figment of one become another's meaning,
Composing in their society the total possibility of the future—
The milling of that vast throng blurred to one obscure yearning
For another time; closed in those vacancies of four walls and a bed
Now blind, cold, deaf, mute, their fire out.

—THEODORE HOLMES

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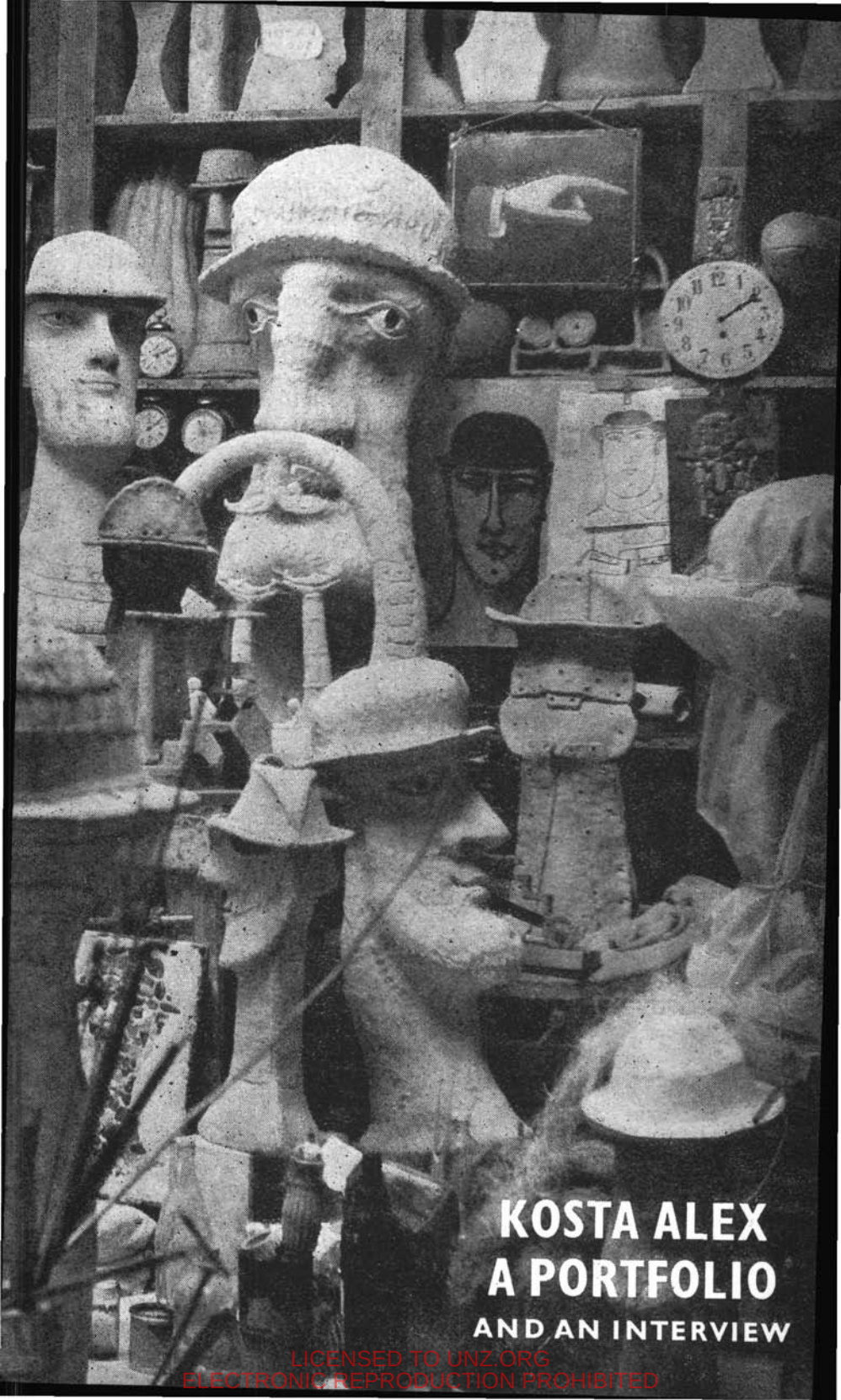

KOSTA ALEX
A PORTFOLIO
AND AN INTERVIEW

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"*I hit this town in 1947 and I've been here since. From New York. I was born in New Jersey and raised in New York. I first met this thing, sculpture, in those neighbourhood clubs designed to keep us bad boys off the streets. Then there was the army and when I was free again I came to Paris. I settled down in Montparnasse. Lots of things happen in Montparnasse.*"

Interviewer. For you the head seems to represent the whole person.
Alex. I try to find the whole body in a head. I usually build from the bottom up, with slabs of clay. The chin often seems to go haywire, it shoots all the way out. The chin becomes the legs of man stepping out, moving forward. In my earlier pieces there was a normal forehead, then little by little it became less and less, as if the brain were starting to shrink, and I became conscious of the need to maybe wear a hat. To hide that deficiency.
I. Do you start with a drawing?
A. Well, drawing is simply to record... a recording. Before I even start a new head I must have it all worked out in my mind. Sometimes a drawing helps me to remember a precise nose or ear that impressed me that I might use later on. Although usually it's lost. Each work belongs to the minute. I work very quickly.
I. How long does it take you to do, let's say, the gentleman over there with the hat?
A. In actual working time, only a few hours. In thought, days, weeks. The one of the necktie, there, I never could finish. I worked on that man, I thought about him, for maybe three months straight, and I just couldn't finish him. And this morning, I chopped the head off. I chopped the head off, and it seems to hold for me now, it's right. And there remains a shirtfront, a necktie and a collar. No head. I suppose someone has to slip his own head through to make it complete. In some pieces you can't see the man, he's on the inside of a kind of bronze case. Sometimes I leave holes for the eyes, sometimes he can speak. In some pieces he can only see, he can't speak, he can't breathe.
I. What did you begin with, ten years ago, in the early days?
A. There were many heads, one after the other. I did my first man with a hat in 1951 among a lot of other works, birds, animals, boats, observation towers, ice-cream scoops, and all of a sudden right smack in the middle of this mixed-up period there was a man with a hat. And he was important to me, I felt very close to him, and many years went by until I found him again, or he found me, I don't know. He came

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again in '57, and this time he stayed. I'm up to my fifty-seventh now. I think the first one was wearing a kind of Napoleon hat. Since then they've started looking alike: they're not really derbies, but I like the round top feeling of a derby, and the brim is important. I think it has to do with protection: the brim protects. If it's outdoors it protects against rain, pigeons, atomic bomb blasts...

I. You once remarked that the bowler hat is a rather cruel hat. Would you call it a bowler hat?

A. No, it's not a bowler, no. It's no kind of a special hat. It is the most pleasing form I can crown my work with, d'you see?

I. There are two or three heads up there almost like plates of clay placed round the head.

A. My cylinder series: I developed those from stacking tin cans.

I. The heads look very simple, yet it's more than merely stacking cylinders: some of the combinations are very complicated. Here in the studio there are hundreds of different studies for the final work.

A. Everything fits. Each work has a reason for being. I give each one a number for identification purposes.

I. Can you say something about that curious flight of stairs up there?

A. I think I did about twenty different studies of stairways. Sculpture is not an easy occupation, and as far as making a living at it goes, I never was able to, and we must eat and pay the rent and all that business, and I worked as a carpenter, and I plastered walls and laid tile floors and built stairways. It started to come out in my studies when I got back to my own work as a sculptor. I think it means being on one level and getting to another, or having a goal and being conscious of it. Usually at the top I put a chair, and that would mean you get to the end of your effort, to the goal, and you simply... sit. Usually the chair's empty, you see, and the people who are climbing the stairs never really get there. The end is something I have never liked. The end is, oh, the end. Sometimes I read books up to the middle.

I. You often amuse yourself telling stories—

A. Yes, I like telling stories, and one of my problems before was, no one would listen. And lately, people are listening. Well, I'll tell my stories as long as there's someone to listen. It's no fun talking to oneself.

I. You tell stories in your work as well.

A. Yes. There's another piece I did a long time ago. I was very much in love with a Chinese girl, and our relationship came to a point where I had to make a decision, whether to take her and keep her, or not at all. The final work has to do with a man standing at a window, and there's a little Chinese girl walking by. He does nothing to try and stop her. He has his projects and she has her way to go. And the work I called, "Don't ever go to China." It simply meant that that girl was not for me. Sometimes when I finish my pieces I break them. If I keep them,

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I usually try to keep them hidden, or facing the wall. Because when I come here the dam things seem to look at me.

I. I see you have "try this again" written on some of them: do you ever try it again?

A. Oh yes. Sometimes I try them over and over and over again. I think it's the same man, only each day he belongs to a new moment and I can't do him the same way. Because I'm never the same way.

I. A while ago you said you had three men, three clients. And you said, with each man there went a women. So you showed me three sculptures of women. And for some reason they seemed to go together.

A. My clients in Montparnasse. I usually sit in the cafés and look at people, and I take home with me their image. What I feel about them comes out in my work. I borrow a nose from someone, the eyes from someone else, the ears—I remember one day I couldn't finish a work because I couldn't find the right ears to terminate the work. I knew he needed a particular type of ears and I just couldn't find them. And two weeks later I saw these ears, and I put them on, and I knew they were the right ears, and the work to me was right. I go to three cafés in Montparnasse: the Dôme, the Coupole and the Select. And I did three works: customers at the Dôme, the Coupole and the Select. Each one represents every man I ever saw in that particular café. I think there's a type of man that goes to a type of place, and you can distinguish his features the way you can hear his accent. And the proof is, I have three different heads! And I did them with the greatest of care and research.

I. Why is it you don't put hats on your women?

A. I don't think women need hats.

I. What are you working on now?

A. Lately it seems I've been wanting to get inside the head and look out through the eyes as the man in my head looks out through my eyes. We see other heads and I wonder what the man in the other head is like. And I wonder what the man in the man in the other head is like.

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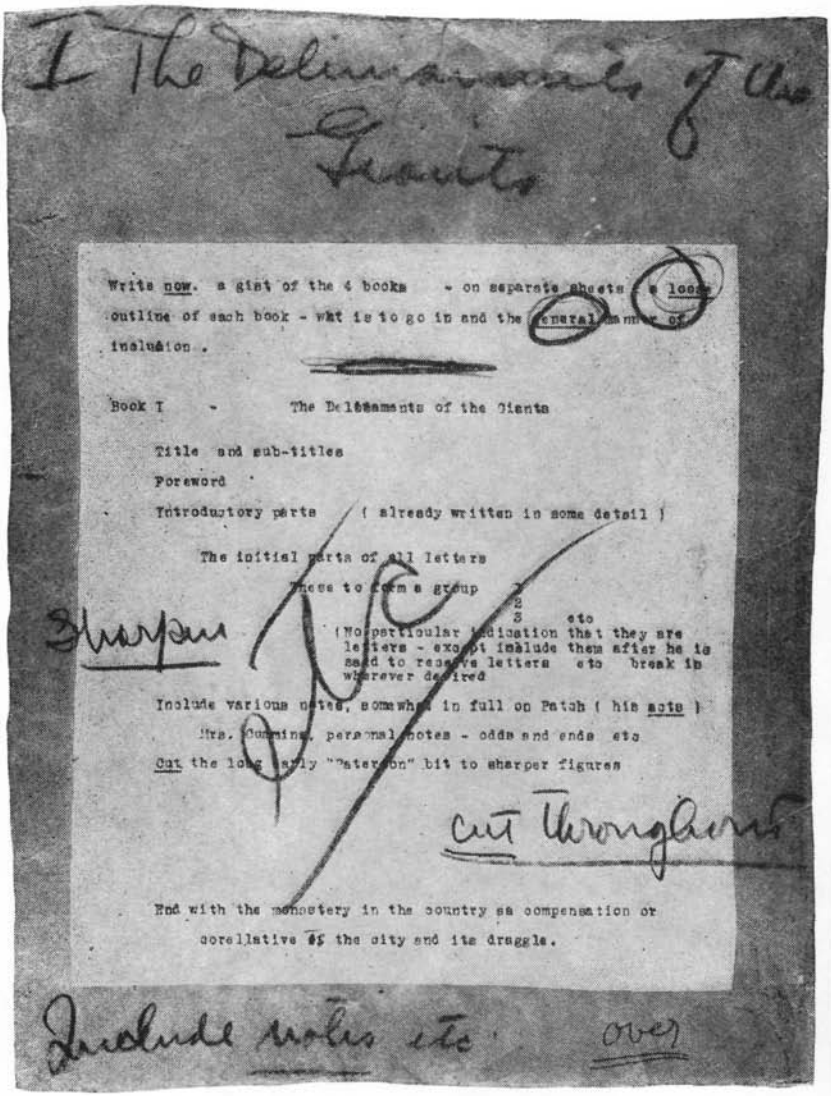
I The Deliverances of the Giants

Write now. a gist of the 4 books - on separate sheets - a loose outline of each book - what is to go in and the general manner of inclusion.

Book I - The Deliverances of the Giants

Title and sub-titles

Foreword

Introductory parts (already written in some detail)

The initial parts of all letters

Theme to form a group 1
2
3 etc
(No particular indication that they are letters - except include them after he is said to receive letters etc break in wherever desired

Include various notes, somewhat in full on Patch (his acts)

Mrs. Cumming, personal notes - odds and ends etc

Cut the long early "Paterson" bit to sharper figures

cut throughout

End with the monastery in the country as compensation or correlative of the city and its draggle.

Include notes etc over

a manuscript page by William Carlos Williams relating to Paterson I. (Thanks are due to the Lockwood Memorial Library of the State University of Buffalo for permission to reproduce this page).

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THE ART OF POETRY VI

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

RUTHERFORD, NEW JERSEY: Number Nine stands on a terrace at the foot of Ridge Road, just where it angles into Park Avenue and the stores along the main street. For fifty years the sign beside the walk read "William C. Williams, M. D." Now it carries the name of his son, with an arrow pointing to the side entrance, and the new office wing. In his last years, Dr. Williams' health suffered from a series of strokes that made it difficult for him to speak, and impaired his physical vigor, so that there would often be a delay before he appeared, pushing out the aluminum storm door and retreating a step or two, extending welcome with a kind of hesitant warmth. On the occasion of the interview, he moved more deliberately than ever, but his greeting was still at pains to be personal. A leisurely progress brought us upstairs past a huge, two-story painting of Williamsburg Bridge filling the stair-

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well, to the study, a room at the back of the house, overlooking the yard. An electric typewriter, which Dr. Williams could no longer use, was at the desk, and, though he could scarcely read, a copy of *The desert music and other poems*, opened to "The Descent" was propped up in the open drawer. In a corner of the room, over a metal filing cabinet, was an oil painting hung against a wallpaper of geometric simplicity. We sat a little away from the desk, toward the window, with the microphone lying on a stack of small magazines between us.

At the time of these talks, in April, 1962, William Carlos Williams was in his seventy-ninth year, author of forty published volumes from *Poems*, 1909, a collection so rare that Mrs. Williams has had trouble holding on to a copy, down through various collected editions and the successive books of *Paterson* to *The Desert Music* and *Journey to Love*. Both of these last volumes were written in an unusual recovery of creative power after Dr. Williams' first serious illness in 1952. Now, with customary impatience, he was fretting to see his latest collection, *Pictures from Brueghel*, scheduled for publication in June. The doorbell never rang but he expected some word from New Directions, though it was still early in spring.

Because it was so hard for Dr. Williams to talk, there was no question of discoursing on topics suggested in advance, and the conversation went on informally, for an hour or two at a time, over several days. The effort it took the poet to find and pronounce words can hardly be indicated here. Many of the sentences ended in no more than a wave of the hand when Mrs. Williams was not present to finish them. But whatever the topic, the poet's mind kept coming back to the technical matters that interested him in his later years. One of these was his concern with "idiom," the movements of speech that he felt to be especially American, as opposed to English. A rival interest was the "variable foot," a metrical device that was to resolve the conflict between form and freedom in verse. The question whether one had not to assume a fixed element in the foot as the basis for meter drew only a typical Williams negative, slightly profane, and no effort was made to pursue this much further. As a result, the notion of some mysterious

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"measure" runs through the interview like an unlaid ghost, promising enough pattern for shapeliness, enough flexibility for all the subtleties of idiom. No wonder a copy of "The Descent" was in evidence as we began; for however much one may argue over the theory of this verse, it is hard to resist the performance.

* * *

On March 4, 1963, William Carlos Williams died in his sleep, at home, of a cerebral hemorrhage that was not unexpected. Two months later *Pictures from Brueghel* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry, and Mrs. Williams accepted, in his name, the Gold Medal for Poetry from the National Institute of Arts and Letters. Though he did not see this interview in print, he approved it in its final stages. Mrs. Williams reports him as having been much entertained by her part in the second half of it.

WILLIAMS

Well, what's to be done.

INTERVIEWER

I would like to ask you about this new measure that I see here—

WILLIAMS

If I could only talk.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps we might begin with Rutherford, whether you thought it was a good environment for you.

WILLIAMS

A very—bad environment—for poets. We didn't take anything seriously—in Ruth—in Rutherford. We didn't take poetry very seriously. As far as recording my voice in Rutherford—I read before the ladies, mostly.

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INTERVIEWER

You mean the Women's Club? How did they like it?

WILLIAMS

Very much: they applauded. I was quite a hero. (*Picking up a volume*) I remember "By the Road to the Contagious Hospital" was one of the ones I read. The hospital was up in Clifton... I was always intent on saying what I had to say in the accents that were native to me. But I didn't know what I was doing. I knew that the measure was intended to record—something. But I didn't know what the measure was. I stumbled all over the place in these earlier poems. For instance, in this one here ("*Queen-Ann's Lace*") I would divide those lines differently now. It's just like the later line, only not opened up in the same way.

INTERVIEWER

You were saying that Rutherford was a bad environment for poets.

WILLIAMS

Yes. But except for my casual conversations about the town, I didn't think anything of it at all. I had a great amount of patience with artisans.

INTERVIEWER

Did you mean it when you said medicine was an interference which you resented?

WILLIAMS

I didn't resent it at all. I just wanted to go straight ahead.

INTERVIEWER

And medicine was not on the way?

WILLIAMS

I don't know whether it would be. I used to give readings at the high school, and Fairleigh Dickinson. I was sympathetic

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with these audiences. I was talking about the same people that I had to do with as patients, and trying to interest them. I was not pretending: I was speaking to them as if they were interested in the same sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER

But were they? Perhaps they felt the double nature of your role, as both poet and doctor, was something of a barrier.

WILLIAMS

No, no. The language itself was what intrigued me. I thought that we were on common territory there.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write the short stories on a different "level" than the poems—as a kind of interlude to them?

WILLIAMS

No, as an alternative. They were written in the form of a conversation which I was partaking in. We were in it together.

INTERVIEWER

Then the composition of them was just as casual and spontaneous as you have suggested. You would come home in the evening and write twelve pages or so without revising?

WILLIAMS

I think so. I was coming *home*. I was placing myself in continuation of a common conversation.

INTERVIEWER

You have insisted that there cannot be a seeking for words in literature. Were you speaking of prose as well as poetry?

WILLIAMS

I think so. Not to choose between words.

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INTERVIEWER

Certainly the word does matter though.

WILLIAMS

It does matter, very definitely. Strange that I could say that.

INTERVIEWER

But when you had come home, and were continuing the experience of reality—

WILLIAMS

Reality. Reality. My vocabulary was chosen out of the intensity of my concern... When I was talking in front of a group, I wasn't interested in impressing them with my power of speech, but only with the seriousness of my intentions toward them. I had to make them come alive.

INTERVIEWER

You have said you felt trapped in Rutherford, that you couldn't get out, never had any contact with anyone here.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still feel that Rutherford hasn't provided enough of the contact you managed to find during the twenties, in New York, with the *Others* group? Was that a genuine contribution to your development?

WILLIAMS

That was not a literary thing exactly. But it was about writing—intensely so. We were speaking straight ahead about what concerned us, and if I could have overheard what I was saying then, that would have given me a hint of how to phrase myself, to say what I had to say. Not after the establishment,

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but speaking straight ahead. I would gladly have traded what I have tried to say, for what came off my tongue, naturally.

INTERVIEWER

Which was not the same?

WILLIAMS

Not free enough. What came off in this writing, finally—*this* writing (*pointing to "The Descent"*)—that was pretty much what I wanted to say, in the way I wanted to say it, then. I was searching in this congeries, I wanted to say something in a certain tone of my voice which would be exactly how I wanted to say it, to measure it in a certain way.

INTERVIEWER

Was this in line with what the others in the group were trying to do?

WILLIAMS

I don't think they knew what they were trying to do; but in effect it was. I couldn't speak like the academy. It had to be modified by the conversation about me. As Marianne Moore used to say, a language dogs and cats could understand. So I think she agrees with me fundamentally. Not the speech of English country people, which would have something artificial about it; not that, but language modified by *our* environment; the American environment.

INTERVIEWER

Your own background is pretty much a mixture of English and Spanish, isn't it? Do you think the Spanish has had any influence on your work?

WILLIAMS

There might have been a permanent impression on my mind. It was certainly different from the French. French is too formal; the Spanish language isn't. They were broad men, as in *El Cid*, very much broader than the French. My relation to

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language was a curious thing. My father was English, but Spanish was spoken in my home. I didn't speak it, but I was read to in Spanish. My mother's relatives used to come up and stay two or three months.

INTERVIEWER

You have said you equated Spanish with the "romantic." Is that a designation you would shrink from?

WILLIAMS

No, not shrink from.

INTERVIEWER

What I was getting at is that you have kept the name "Carlos."

WILLIAMS

I had no choice but to keep the "Carlos."

INTERVIEWER

I understand Solomon Hoheb, your mother's father, was Dutch.

WILLIAMS

Maybe. The Spanish came from the Sephardic Jews. Though the English was strong indeed, through my grandfather.

INTERVIEWER

You've been more conscious of the Spanish, then, than of the other.

WILLIAMS

Yes! I've insisted on breaking with my brother's memory of the Williams as English. All one needs to do is look at my nose. Flossie says "I love your nose." And the hell with my nose, after all. The thing that concerns me is the theory of what I was determined to do with measure, what you encounter on the page. It must be transcribed to the page from

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the lips of the poet, as it was with such a master as Sappho. "The Descent" was very important to me in that way.

INTERVIEWER

You mean that is where it finally happened?

WILLIAMS

Yes, there it happened; and before that it didn't. I remember writing this (*trying to read*):

The descent beckons
as the ascent beckoned.
Memory is a kind...

INTERVIEWER

Of accomplishment.

WILLIAMS

A sort of renewal
even
an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new places

You see how I run that line? I was very much excited when I wrote this. I had to do something. I was sitting there with the typewriter in front of me. I was attempting to imitate myself (I think I can't even see it at all) but it didn't come alive to me.

INTERVIEWER

It seems to me you were reading it just now.

WILLIAMS

More or less. But something went wrong with me. I can't make it out any more. I can't type.

INTERVIEWER

Would a tape recorder or a dictaphone be uncongenial?

WILLIAMS

No, anything that would serve me I'd gladly adopt.

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INTERVIEWER

The appearance of this poem on the page suggests you were conscious of it as a thing—something for the eye.

WILLIAMS

Yes, very good. I was conscious of making it even. I wanted it to read regularly.

INTERVIEWER

Not just to please the eye.

WILLIAMS

The total effect is very important.

INTERVIEWER

But the care in placing the words—did you ever feel you would be as happy painting?

WILLIAMS

I'd like to have been a painter, and it would have given me at least as great a satisfaction as being a poet.

INTERVIEWER

But you say you are a "word man."

WILLIAMS

Yes, that took place early in my development. I was early inducted into my father's habit of reading—that made me a poet, not a painter. My mother was a painter. Her brother Carlos won the *Grand Prix*—the *Gros Lot*, it was called—then he financed her to go to Paris, to study painting. Then the money ran out.

INTERVIEWER

And she met your father through Carlos, whom he knew in—

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WILLIAMS

Puerto Plata. My father was a business man, interested in South America. But he always loved books. He used to read poetry to me. Shakespeare. He had a group who used to come to our house, a Shakespeare club. They did dramatic readings. So I was always interested in Shakespeare, and Grandmother was interested in the stage—my father's mother. Emily Dickinson, her name was. Isn't that amazing?

INTERVIEWER

Quite a coincidence: I notice a picture of her namesake over the desk.

WILLIAMS

Emily was my patron saint. She was also an American, seeking to divide the line in some respectable way. We were all of us Americans.

INTERVIEWER

Then you did read a good bit of her at some stage, with your father?

WILLIAMS

My father didn't know anything about Emily Dickinson. He was sold on Shakespeare. (*Doorbell rings. WCW makes his way downstairs to answer it*).

INTERVIEWER

(*As he returns*) You say you were hoping it might be the new volume?

WILLIAMS

Yes. I am keenly disappointed. But that's always the way it is with me—my life's blood dripping away. Laughlin has been a wonderful friend, but it's always so goddam *slow!* I have still the illusion that I will be able to talk when I make these connections. It's possible, because I am an emotional creature, and if I could only talk, to you for instance. Here is a person

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well-intentioned toward me, meaning yourself, and I can't talk to him. It makes me furious.

INTERVIEWER

It's good of you to put up with this business at all. We were talking about painting and the theater and poetry. Was that a natural progression for you?

WILLIAMS

More or less; stemming from frustration. I was wondering —I was seeking to be articulate.

INTERVIEWER

At one point you wanted to be an actor.

WILLIAMS

I had no skill as an actor. But through Dad's reading, the plays of Shakespeare made an impression on me. He didn't *want* them to necessarily, just to read them—as words, that came off as speech.

INTERVIEWER

How did this interest in words make you interested in poetry as opposed, say, to writing novels?

WILLIAMS

That didn't have any connection.

INTERVIEWER

The words weren't sufficiently important in prose?

WILLIAMS

No. I never thought I was a very good prose writer anyway. But when I speak of Emily Dickinson—she was an independent spirit. She did her best to get away from too strict an interpretation. And she didn't want to be confined to rhyme or reason. (Even in Shakespeare, the speech of the players: it was annoying to him to have to rhyme, for godsake). And she

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followed the American idiom. She didn't know it, but she followed it none the less. I was a better poet...

INTERVIEWER

You are speaking about language now, not form.

WILLIAMS

Yes; her native speech. She was a wild girl. She chafed against restraint. But she speaks the spoken language, the idiom, which would be deformed by Oxford English.

INTERVIEWER

This new measure of yours, in the later poems, is meant then to accommodate the American speech rhythms.

WILLIAMS

Yes. It's a strange phenomenon, my writing. I think what I have been searching for...

INTERVIEWER

You were suggesting that Emily Dickinson had something to do with it; and her objection to rhyme. But that you were a better poet.

WILLIAMS

Oh yes (*laughing*). She was a real good guy. I thought I was a better poet because the American idiom was so close to me, and she didn't get what the poets were doing at that time—writing according to a new method, not the English method, which wouldn't have made much sense to an American. Whitman was on the right track, but when he switched to the English intonation, and followed the English method of recording the feet, he didn't realize it was a different method, which was not satisfactory to an American. Everything started with Shakespeare.

INTERVIEWER

Because it was meant to be spoken?

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WILLIAMS

Yes. But when the Shakespearean line was recorded, it was meant to be a formal thing, divided in the English method according to what was written on the page. The Americans shouldn't tolerate that. An Englishman—an English rhetorician, an actor—will speak like Shakespeare, but it's only rhetorical. He can't be true to his own speech. He has to change it in order to conform.

INTERVIEWER

You think it is easier for the English to conform, in poetry, to their kind of speech pattern than it is for an American? You don't think for example that Frost is as true to the American idiom as you are trying to be?

WILLIAMS

No, I don't think so. Eliot, on the other hand, was trying to find a way to record the speech and he didn't find it. He wanted to be regular, to be true to the American idiom, but he didn't find a way to do it. One has to bow down finally, either to the English or to the American.

INTERVIEWER

Eliot went to England; you stayed here.

WILLIAMS

To my sorrow.

INTERVIEWER

To your sorrow? What do you mean by that?

WILLIAMS

(*yielding, perhaps*) It is always better to stick to something.

INTERVIEWER

It's rare to find someone who has. Eliot says he would not be the same if he had stayed. You have said there was a great virtue in the kind of isolation you experienced here.

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WILLIAMS

A key question.

INTERVIEWER

And you have been called our most valuable homespun sensitivity.

WILLIAMS

Homespun sensitivity. Very good.

INTERVIEWER

But you still feel it was a bad environment.

WILLIAMS

It was native, but I doubt that it was very satisfactory to me personally. Though it did provide the accent which satisfied me.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think you could have picked a better one? Do you think you would have been happier in Boston, or Hartford, or New York, or Paris?

WILLIAMS

I might have picked a better one, if I had wanted to—which I did. But if I lived there—if its language was familiar to me, if that was the kind of conversation which I heard, which I grew up with—I could tolerate the vulgarity because it forced me to speak in a particular manner. Not the English intonation.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still feel that the English influence on Eliot set us back twenty years?

WILLIAMS

Very definitely. He was a conformist. He wanted to go back to the iambic pentameter; and he did go back to it, very well; but he didn't acknowledge it.

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INTERVIEWER

You say that you could never be a calm speaker, so that this unit you use, which isn't either a foot or a line necessarily, and which works by speech impulses, this is meant to reflect also your own nervous habit of speech—in which things come more or less in a rush.

WILLIAMS

Common sense would force me to work out some such method.

INTERVIEWER

You do pause, though, in the midst of these lines.

WILLIAMS

Very definitely.

INTERVIEWER

Then what is the integrity of the line?

WILLIAMS

If I was consistent in myself it would be very much more effective than it is now. I would have followed much closer to the indicated divisions of the line than I did. It's too haphazard.

INTERVIEWER

The poetry? You admit that in prose, but—

WILLIAMS

In poetry also. I think I was too haphazard.

INTERVIEWER

In the later poems—like "The Orchestra" here—you think there is still some work to do?

WILLIAMS

It's not successful. It would be classical if it had the proper division of lines. "Reluctant mood," "stretches and yawns." What the devil is that? It isn't firmly enough stated. It's all very complicated—but I can't go on.

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INTERVIEWER

You mean you can't find a theory to explain what you do naturally.

WILLIAMS

Yes. It's all in the ear. I wanted to be regular. To continue that...

INTERVIEWER

(*Picking up a copy of* Paterson V, *from which some clippings to the floor*) These opening lines—they make an image on the page.

WILLIAMS

Yes, I was imitating the flight of the bird.

INTERVIEWER

Then it's directed—

WILLIAMS

To the eyes; read it.

INTERVIEWER

"In old age the mind casts off..."

WILLIAMS

In old age
the mind
casts off
rebelliously
an eagle
from its crag

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever think of using any other city as subject for a poem?

WILLIAMS

I didn't dare any mention of it in *Paterson*, but I thought

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As Weehawken is to Hamilton

is
to Provence we'll say, he hated it

of which he knew nothing and cared less

and used it inhis scheems - so

founding the counding which was to
try

increase to be the wonder of the world
in its day

which was to exceed his london on which he patterened it

(A key figure in the development)

If any one is important more important
than the edge of a knife or a poem is: or an irrelevance #
- point of a dagger -
in the life of a people: see Da Da or the murders of a
Staline

or a Li Po

or an obscre Montezuma

or a forgotten Socrates or Aristotle before the destruction
of the library of Alexandria (as note derisively by Berad Shaw)
by fire in which the poes of Sappho were lost

and brings us (Alex was born out of wedlock)

illegitimately perversion ###### righed though that alone
does not a make a poet or a statesman

- Wahington was a six foot four man with a wakk voice and a slow mind which made it inconvenient for him to move fast - and so he stayed. He had a will bred in the slow woods so that when he moved the world moved out of has way.

A fragment of the continuation of Paterson

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a crayon drawing by WCW as a child

WCW with kittens: Ridge Road, taken by e e cummings, 1928

WCW holding toy plane, Rutherford 1962

Rutherford, 1962

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strongly of Manhattan when I was looking about for a city to celebrate. I thought it was not particularized enough for me, not American in the sense I wanted. It was near enough, God knows, and I was familiar enough with it for all my purposes —but so was Leipzig, where I lived for a year when I was young, or Paris. Or even Vienna or even Frascati. But Manhattan escaped me.

INTERVIEWER

Someone remarks in one of these clippings that there is no reason the poem should ever end. Part Four completes the cycle, Five renews it. Then what?

WILLIAMS

(*laughing*) Go on repeating it. At the end—the last part, the dance—

INTERVIEWER

"We can know nothing but the dance..."

WILLIAMS

The dance.

To dance to a measure
contrapuntally,
Satyrically, the tragic foot.

That has to be interpreted; but how are you going to interpret it?

INTERVIEWER

I don't presume to interpret it; but perhaps the satyrs represent the element of freedom, of energy within the form.

WILLIAMS

Yes. The satyrs are understood as action, a dance. I always think of the Indians there.

INTERVIEWER

Is anything implied, in "contrapuntally," about the nature of the foot?

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WILLIAMS

It means "musically"—it's a musical image. The Indians had a beat in their own music, which they beat with their feet. It isn't an image exactly, a poetic image. Or perhaps it is. The beat goes according to the image. It should all be so simple; but with my damaged brain—

INTERVIEWER

We probably shouldn't be trying to reduce a poetic statement to prose, when we have *The Desert Music* here: "Only the poem..."

WILLIAMS

"The counted poem, to an exact measure."

INTERVIEWER

You think it should be more exact then, than you have yet made it.

WILLIAMS

Yes, it should be more exact, in Milton's sense. Milton counted the syllables.

INTERVIEWER

"And I could not help thinking of the wonders of the brain that hears that music."

WILLIAMS

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

'And of our skill *sometimes* to record it." Do you still feel that such modesty is in order?

WILLIAMS

Modesty is in order, God knows—facing the universe of sound.

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INTERVIEWER

At least you are not talking about painting now.

WILLIAMS

No. I'm more or less committed to poetry.

* * *

Talking with Mrs. Williams—the Flossie of *White Mule*—is like going on with a conversation with Dr. Williams: the same honesty, the same warmth, mixed perhaps with briskness and reserve. The living room of their house reflects the interests they have had in common—the paintings, the flowers, the poetry. For fifty years the daily mail brought letters, books, journals, to accumulate in corners and cupboards and on tables around the edges of the room: books from authors and publishers, books with dedications to WCW, or titles borrowed from his poems; and the whole lot of those almost anonymous little magazines that he encouraged with contributions: poems, articles, the inevitable "visit with W.C.W." On the first day of these particular interviews, a new hi-fi set still in its crate stood in the middle of the room, a gift from the second son, Paul. Now, while waiting for Dr. Williams to come in, Mrs. Williams put on a record, and we listened to the poet's voice for a while, recorded in this same room with occasional sounds of local traffic coming through. It was an aging voice, unmodulated and didactic, but curiously effective in reading the late poems. Mrs. Williams talked about the town of Rutherford, and the poet's brother Edgar, an architect with plans for improving life along the Passaic. She talked of the house when they first moved into it, and of her early impressions of Bill Williams as a young man, at a stage of their life when he was generally off in New York at the clinics, or at various literary gatherings.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have to be converted to poetry, in those early days?

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MRS. WILLIAMS

No, I was sympathetic. Of course, Bill never paid much attention to me. He used to come to see my sister, who was quite a bit older. She played the piano, and Bill played the violin; not very well. And Edgar sang. Bill didn't read his poetry to me then. He read some to my sister, but she didn't think much of it. Bill's early verse was pretty bad.

INTERVIEWER

I understand Dr. Williams wrote a sonnet a day for a year, when he was at Pennsylvania. Edgar says he called it brain-wash, or something worse.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Meeting Ezra Pound seemed to make a difference. It was not really a literary relationship at first. They were too wholly different, but I think that was the turning point. From that time Bill began seriously to want to write poetry. But he realized he couldn't make a living at it.

INTERVIEWER

How did he happen to become a doctor?

MRS. WILLIAMS

His father wanted him to be a dentist. Bill was willing to try. But he hated it. Bill was just too nervous to stand in one spot. But he loved being a doctor, making house calls, and talking to people.

INTERVIEWER

He didn't care to be a surgeon?

MRS. WILLIAMS

He didn't have the long fingers he thought a surgeon should have. That's why he was never a good violinist. But he and Edgar both had ability with their hands. Edgar was a master at drawing, and Bill used to paint. And of course he loves to garden. Two years ago he turned over that whole garden

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for me when he could scarcely use his right arm. Things would really grow for him.

INTERVIEWER

Was there much literary life in Rutherford?

MRS. WILLIAMS

Not until much later. We had no literary contacts in Rutherford at all: except for Miss Owen, who taught the sixth grade. She knew what Bill was trying to do.

INTERVIEWER

I had the feeling Dr. Williams felt there was no real response to his poetry, even when he read to local groups.

MRS. WILLIAMS

They took what they could get, and ignored the rest—it just wasn't for them. I think to this day very few people in Rutherford know anything about Bill's writing.

INTERVIEWER

Is that a comment on the town or the writing?

MRS. WILLIAMS

I think both. It's a lower middle class type of mind, and Bill has never attracted a general audience. My mother used to try to get me to influence him.

INTERVIEWER

To write more conventionally?

MRS. WILLIAMS

Yes. Some of it I didn't like myself, but I never interfered. And I was never blamed for not liking it. (*Telephone rings*). I'll get it, Bill. (*Answering*) Is it an emergency? No, there are no office hours on Friday. (*Returning from phone*) A patient for young Bill. He left the answering service off. That's what happens.

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INTERVIEWER

I suppose you are used to that by now.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(*groaning*) Yes, by now I'm afraid I am.

INTERVIEWER

Is Dr. Williams not writing now?

MRS. WILLIAMS

No, not for over a year; he can't. He just can't find the words.

INTERVIEWER

Was he writing very much when you were first engaged?

MRS. WILLIAMS

No; once in a while he would send me a poem. But he was busy building up his practice. After we were married he wrote more. I saw to it that he had time, and I made it pleasant for people who came here—because I liked them myself. They were much more interesting than most of the local people. Everyone you can think of used to be in and out. We were the only ones who had a permanent address in all that time. For fifty years, this was headquarters for them all. There was Marsden Hartley—that was his only pastel, over the divan there. He was broke and wanted to go to Germany, so he had an auction at Steiglitz's gallery, An American Place. Bill bought another one at the same time, an unfinished oil up in the study. Maxwell Bodenheim came and stayed a couple of weeks once. He almost drove us crazy. (He was supposed to have a broken arm but Bill was never convinced of it.) He was quite dirty and disagreeable. He couldn't eat carrots, though we had to have them, for the children's sake. And he stuttered terribly. One day we received a telegram from him saying "Send $200 at once am going to marry a very beautiful girl. Maxwell." He was later found murdered in his apartment in New York, with his wife, if she was his wife; prob-

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ably not the one in the telegram. Then there was Wallace Gould, whom you may not know, a friend of Hartley's from Maine. His mother was an American Indian. And Marianne Moore used to come out with her mother. Bill's writing developed tremendously in that period. There was a group up at Grantwood, near Fort Lee. Malcom Cowley was in it; and Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Alfred Kreymbourg. Robert Brown had the one solid house; the others all lived around in their little shacks. Later on they used to meet in New York, at Lola Ridge's place. She had a big, barn-like studio. I suppose today you would call her a communist, though I never heard any talk of that kind. She was older than most of the young writers. Then there was John Reed, who wrote *Seven Days That Shook the World*; and Louise Bryant—they were all in that group. And there we were. There were arguments; they were all very serious about their writing. They used to get up and read—they would always read. It used to be deadly sometimes. But then I wasn't *too* interested in the group, and after all I had two small children. And then in the thirties, there were the Friends of William Carlos Williams—Ford Madox Ford's group. Toward the end we had a big party for them out here. But that was rather ridiculous. Bill says it was poor old Ford's last gasp for—you know, a group around him. He was dying on his feet. And he did die a couple of years later.

INTERVIEWER

How did you get along with Ezra Pound.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Pound was never around. Pound came over in... I think, 1938 to get an honorary degree at Hamilton. And he spent two days with us when he was released from St. Elizabeth's in 1958, before he sailed for Italy. I wouldn't know what to say of this last impression. He was self-centered, as always. You couldn't talk to him; it was impossible. The only one he ever talked to nicely was Win Scott. It just happened that Win came out to see us, and they got along beautifully.

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Ezra always tried to tell Bill off, but they got along as friends over the years. Bill wasn't afraid of him; their letters used to be rather acrimonious, back and forth.

INTERVIEWER

(*to WCW looking in*) Apparently those letters don't represent your final attitude?

WILLIAMS

No; the only thing that I remember was the attitude of Flossie's father—

MRS. WILLIAMS

But that has nothing to do with Ezra's last visit here, dear.

WILLIAMS

Just a passing comment. (*Withdraws*).

MRS. WILLIAMS

Bill and Ezra wrote quite a number of letters to each other when the war started; they were on such opposite sides. Ezra was definitely pro-Fascist, much as he may deny it, and Bill was just the opposite. Not pro-semitic, but not anti-semitic either, by any means.

INTERVIEWER

After the war, wasn't there some local concern about Dr. Williams' so-called communism?

MRS. WILLIAMS

That was in 1952, when Bill was going down to take the chair of poetry. Senator McCarthy was in the news then, and they were frightened to death in Washington. There was a woman who was lobbying for a reform in poetry, who had no use for free verse. She had a little periodical, I've forgotten the name of it, and she wrote a letter saying what an outrage it was that a man like that...

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INTERVIEWER

Of course, this was all in the aftermath of the Bollingen award to Pound.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Bill had nothing to do with that. But if he had been a member of the Fellows then, he would certainly have voted for him.

INTERVIEWER

Was Dr. Williams ever asked to testify against Pound?

MRS. WILLIAMS

They questioned him two or three times. They wanted him to listen to some records, and swear it was Pound. Bill couldn't do that, but he said he would tell them frankly what he knew. And that was all. Everytime we went down to Washington, Bill went to see him.

INTERVIEWER

Going back to the first World War: perhaps this isn't something you want to go into, but there were some local reactions then, weren't there?

MRS. WILLIAMS

Against Germans. Yes; that would involve Bill because he was married to me. Bill's mother made my life one hell because I was partly German. Though she wasn't living with us then.

INTERVIEWER

So with one thing and another—Greenwich Village, Communism, and the Germans—

MRS. WILLIAMS

Bill was always in a controversy. But I think he stood his ground very well through it all.

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WILLIAMS

(*Coming in, and with his hands on Mrs. Williams' shoulders*) Maybe you've had enough.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Oh Bill, it's all right. Don't worry about me. Go out and take a walk.

INTERVIEWER

(*to WCW*) Do you have any recollection of writing a play for the P.T.A. years ago? It was on some local issue, like putting in a school nurse, on which you took a liberal view.

WILLIAMS

I can't think. I was certainly interested in plays. But the only person I ever worked with was Kitty Hoagland.

MRS. WILLIAMS

That was *Many Loves*, much later. Kitty didn't come until the thirties. But Bill wrote four or five small plays during those early years. One about the Dutch around this area; and a very nice little play called "The Apple Tree" that was going to be done at the Provincetown, but Alfred Kreymbourg lost it. And a Puritan play, "Betty Putnam," that was acted over at the Tennis Club. Do you remember the old tennis courts over on Montross Avenue? There was a very active young group connected with it.

INTERVIEWER

But the town itself didn't quite get all this, I suppose. (*To WCW*) Your brother Edgar says it's a narrow town, and what you have done is in spite of it.

WILLIAMS

Yes. There were some aristocrats back there who would have nothing to do with budding genius.

INTERVIEWER

Not to mention political matters. Edgar says that in the

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political club which your father started, you were always the liberal.

WILLIAMS

Yes, to my sorrow.

INTERVIEWER

To your sorrow?

MRS. WILLIAMS

He doesn't mean it! I don't see why—

WILLIAMS

Do I mean it? For godsake, my friends have all been pretty disillusioned friends.

INTERVIEWER

Marianne Moore, who knows you pretty well, says you were always a bit "reckless."

WILLIAMS

I guess she's right. I was a Unitarian. And Unitarians are liberals.

MRS. WILLIAMS

I think Bill has always been willing to be reckless. There was the social credit business for instance, that Bill got involved in in the thirties. They wanted to give a kind of dividend to the people to increase purchasing power. There were large meetings in New York and down at the University of Virginia. But that was about the end of it. In fact many of those involved withdrew from it when they saw how things were going, with the war coming on and all. Some of them were so nervous about that whole episode they wouldn't even speak to Bill. That's the difference. I don't say Bill was naive; perhaps it was honesty. Bill isn't a radical or a communist or anything else. He's an honest man. And if he gets into it with both feet, it's just too bad. That's the way it's been.

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INTERVIEWER

(*to WCW*) Right?

WILLIAMS

(*Agrees, laughing*)

INTERVIEWER

If we could talk a few more minutes about personal matters—how did you enjoy Saint Thomas? I understand you have just come back from there.

WILLIAMS

I could stay there forever, with reservations, of course. Saint Thomas is the place where my father grew up. I remember a photograph of the blizzard area—oh for godsake, I mean the hurricane, in '88.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Bill dear, I'm sorry but it must have been in the seventies. It was when your father was a boy.

WILLIAMS

(*with a sigh*) Yes, yes, yes (*laughs*). I remember a story of the hurricane. Thoroughly documented. How first the water went out of the harbor and left it dry, the ships lying on their beams' ends, and then another shudder and an earthquake worse than they ever had in the area. And I have a distinct memory of some photographs of my father, taken at perhaps 21 years of age. I was very much interested in making contact with his memory.

MRS. WILLIAMS

It was a good trip, but Bill gets restless. And it's too difficult at our age.

WILLIAMS

I think we'll not go again.

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INTERVIEWER

To get back for a minute to the troubles of 1952—do you think you were working too hard at that time?

WILLIAMS

I was interested in the process of composition—in the theory of it. And I *was* working pretty hard at it. But I couldn't make much of it.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Bill had a contract with Random House for three books. There was no hurry; but that's the only way Bill can work. And he doesn't want to look things over, which is his worst fault. *The Build-up* was written then. I'm afraid Bill garbled that one. It was just impatience. And he didn't want me to read the things either. I wish I had, there were so many errors in the *Autobiography*. That was inexcusable. Then, one night in the winter of '48, Bill felt a pain in his chest, shovelling out the car. He kept going until February. I used to drive around with him on house calls. But it was too much.

WILLIAMS

I had a heart attack. Perhaps it was a good thing. I thought I was God almighty, I guess; in general. But I got over that one.

MRS. WILLIAMS

There wasn't any kind of cerebral trouble until 1950 or so. Bill had given up medicine and we were going down to take the chair of poetry in Washington. But in 1952, when we were up visiting the Abbots, in New York, Bill had a serious stroke.

WILLIAMS

I tried to play it down. I was conscious, and rational; and I could joke about it. But I was in a strange house, and I needed to get home. I couldn't write—

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MRS. WILLIAMS

Then suddenly you could hardly understand him.

WILLIAMS

That was the end. I was through with life.

MRS. WILLIAMS

No it wasn't the end. You had a lot of life left. You had a whole play running through your mind while you were lying there, *The Cure*. You thought it out and dictated the notes to me. You wrote it when we got home.

INTERVIEWER

That was something of a change in approach.

WILLIAMS

Yes, the novels I just did as I want along, at first; though I tried to think them out as well as I could.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Of course the *White Mule* was about a baby; Bill's favorite subject. But most of the later poems were written after the stroke. Bill used to say things like spelling didn't matter, and he would never correct at all. I think he did much better work after the stroke slowed him down.

WILLIAMS

(*perhaps grudgingly*) The evidence is there.

INTERVIEWER

It was when you were at the Abbotts that someone read Theocritus to you.

WILLIAMS

Yes, Mrs. Gratwick; I asked her to. Theocritus was always strong in my mind. But I wasn't capable of hearing it in the Greek. I'm in an unfortunate position, because I don't have the original language. For example, I started to take Latin at

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Horace Mann, but the teacher was withdrawn, to my infinite regret. That was the end of that—all my life, that was the end. And I always regretted too that I didn't know Greek. I don't know, as far as the Theocritus was concerned, whether it came first, or the stroke.

MRS. WILLIAMS

You had talked of doing an adaptation.

INTERVIEWER

Why Theocritus?

WILLIAMS

The pastoral nature of it gave me a chance to spread myself. It was Greek, and it appealed to me; and it was a wonderful chance to record my feeling of respect for the Greek classics.

INTERVIEWER

There was a change in the verse in the fifties. Was this the first time you tried the new measure?

WILLIAMS

"The Descent" was the first. I regard that as an experiment in the variable foot.

INTERVIEWER

You said earlier that you were almost unconscious when you wrote it.

WILLIAMS

Yes, I was. I was very much excited. I wasn't conscious of doing anything unusual but I realized that something had occurred to me, which was a very satisfying conclusion to my poetic process. Something happened to my line that completed it, completed the rhythm, or at least it was satisfying to me. It was still an irregular composition; but not too much so; but I couldn't complete it. I had written that poem to retain

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the things which *would* have been the completion of the poem. But as for picking the thing up and going on with it, I had to acknowledge I was licked. I didn't dare fool with the poem so that it would have been more rigid; I wouldn't have wanted that.

INTERVIEWER

You felt there was nothing more you could do with it?

WILLIAMS

Nothing more. I felt all that I could do with it had been done, but it was not complete. I returned to it; but the irregularity of that poem could not be repeated by me. It was too... I've forgotten.

INTERVIEWER

You feel it wasn't a perfect poem.

WILLIAMS

It was too regular. There were variations of mood which would have led me to make a different poem out of it.

INTERVIEWER

And you don't think anything after "The Descent" goes beyond it?

WILLIAMS

No. I always wanted to do something more with it, but I didn't know how.

MRS. WILLIAMS

There was one written quite a long time before: that was the start of it. Then there was the "Daphne and Virginia,"—Virginia of course was Paul's wife, and Daphne is Bill's... That poem always makes me sad. "The Orchestra" was written in 1954 or '55, I think. Bill wrote quite a lot after he had the stroke. It's really amazing what he has done; and he gave readings, too, in St. Louis, Chicago, Savannah—

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WILLIAMS

I couldn't break through.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Harvard, Brandeis, Brown. We took two trips to the coast after that—to U.C.L.A., the University of California, Washington—

WILLIAMS

I've been going down hill rapidly.

INTERVIEWER

And the *Pictures from Brueghel*?

WILLIAMS

Yes, those are late; very late. But they are too regular.

INTERVIEWER

Did you ever grow any fonder of the academic world after your trips around the campuses?

MRS. WILLIAMS

They liked *him*, at least. And the girls' colleges all loved him.

WILLIAMS

The high point was the appearance at Wellesley. It was a very successful impromptu appearance; a reading. I always remember the satisfaction I got pleasing the ladies—the kids.

INTERVIEWER

Beginning with the Women's Club in Rutherford.

WILLIAMS

Always. I was always for the ladies.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Bill has always been fond of women, and terribly disap-

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pointed not to have had a sister. And he never had a daughter. But women liked him; they sensed that he was sympathetic, and they could talk to him.

WILLIAMS

Very sympathetic.

INTERVIEWER

Just one or two more questions. Do you think your medical training—your discipline in science—has had any effect on your poetry?

WILLIAMS

The scientist is very important to the poet, because his language is important to him.

INTERVIEWER

To the scientist?

WILLIAMS

Well, and the poet. I don't pretend to go too far. But I have been taught to be accurate in my speech.

INTERVIEWER

But not scholastic. Someone has said you would not make so much of the great American language if you had been judicious about things.

WILLIAMS

It's a point well taken. The writing of English is a great pastime. The only catch to that is when a man adds the specification "English." That is purely accidental and means nothing. Any language could be inserted in its place. But the restrictions that are accepted in the classics of a language enclose it in a corset of mail which becomes its chief distinction.

MRS. WILLIAMS

Bill has always experimented. He was never satisfied to keep doing the same thing. And he has been severely criticized.

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But I think some of the younger poets are benefitting from it. Like Charles Tomlinson, and Robert Creeley—they've learned a lot from Bill. David Ignatow—any number of them. Allen Ginsberg was a good friend for many years.

WILLIAMS

I am a little concerned about the form. The art of the poem nowadays is something unstable; but at least the construction of the poem should make sense; you should know where you stand. Many questions haven't been answered as yet. Our poets may be wrong; but what can any of us do with his talent but try to develop his vision, so that through frequent failures we may learn better what we have missed in the past.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think you yourself have left of special value to the new poets?

WILLIAMS

The variable foot—the division of the line according to a new method that would be satisfactory to an American. It's all right if you are not intent on being national. But an American is forced to try to give the intonation. Either it *is* important or it is not important. It must have occurred to an American that the question of the line *was* important. The American idiom has much to offer us that the English language has never heard of. As for my own elliptic way of approach, it may be baffling, but it is not unfriendly, and not, I think, entirely empty.

MRS. WILLIAMS

All the young people come out to see Bill. Charles Olsen has been here a lot. Denise Levertov was out last week. Then there is Robert Wallace, Muriel Rukeyser, Charles Bell, Tram Combs. Charles Tomlinson stopped in on his way back to England.

WILLIAMS

Yes. He is writing in my vein. He's even conscious of

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copying me. I don't think he is too popular with his contemporaries. But it does look suspiciously like the beginning of something in England. I defer to you. But—do you have an example of his poems there?

INTERVIEWER

He seems to be carrying on the new measure. Do you have any comment?

WILLIAMS

The lines are not as I would have done, not loose enough. Not enough freedom. He didn't ignore the rules enough to make it really satisfactory.

INTERVIEWER

But you think he shows your influence in England, finally. That must be a satisfaction.

WILLIAMS

It is.

MRS. WILLIAMS

I think Bill will shortly be published in England.

INTERVIEWER

You would think they might have appreciated the American idiom.

WILLIAMS

Not *my* American idiom.

MRS. WILLIAMS

(*Looking about among the books*) These are some translations of Bill's poems in Italian—the early poems; *Paterson*; *The Desert Music.*

WILLIAMS

Yes, I was very pleased by those.

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WITH AWAKING, love wakens
though its shadows
which are alive by reason
of the sun shining -
grow sleepy now and drop away
from desire .

LOVE WITHOUT shadows stirs now
beginning to awaken
as night
advances.

THE DESCENT
made up of despairs
and without accomplishment
realizes a new awakening :
which is a reversal
of despair.
For what we cannot accomplish, what
is denied to love.
what we have lost in the anticipation -
a desert follows,
endless and indestructible .

MS The Descent, from The Desert Music

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MRS. WILLIAMS

Here are some selected poems in German: *Gedichte*, 1962.

WILLIAMS

I'm alive—

MRS. WILLIAMS

There is a selection coming out now in Czechoslovakia. And here is an anthology of "American Lyrics" in Norwegian—

WILLIAMS

I'm still alive!

—STANLEY KOEHLER

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PELICAN OF THE WILDERNESS

Herbert Lobsenz

"Muss es *sein*?" I asked. "Shall the clouds return after the rain?"

"Not according to the wireless. The wireless said it would be fine all weekend; sunny and warm."

"But look above you. The stars are darkened and the evil days have come."

"In other words you are contradicting the report of the Weather Bureau?"

"Yes, I am."

"Sorry sir, that's not allowed." He looked over his shoulder and clapped his hands three times.

Four enormous guards appeared from nowhere and gripped me by each of my limbs. They lifted me from the ground and I remember dropping my pallette. I was borne away and clapped into jail for the rest of my natural life.

At this point I awakened to the nightmare screams of my landlady's idiot son. They came through the door, which I leave open at night since my room is underground and has no windows, and were right on schedule. He is reliable as an

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alarm clock. In fact, I often think he is not an idiot at all, but diabolically shrewd and given to putting antic dispositions on, which is not an uncommon trait in England, especially before a foreigner.

He looks insane enough, yet one can observe him for weeks at a time and fail to catch him in one irrational action. Also, he is near-sighted to the point of blindness. His range of vision is less than a foot. Beyond that he sees absolutely nothing. If he reads he must hold the page three inches from his eyes and screw his face into a fiendish squint. Yet he never wears glasses and so gives that impression of unbearable intensity and perpetual straining common to near-sighted people and to the deaf.

However, I knew he was insane from the very first moment I saw him, which was when I rang the bell here two months ago after seeing there was a room to let. I had been evicted from my previous room on Boxing Day because of a lesson I tried to teach my colleague boarders.

I descended one evening (it was an attic room) to find a note on the table in the vestibule. It was addressed to the tenants of the house and weighted down by a tin box with a slot cut in the top of it.

TO THE TENANTS OF—(I suppress the address)
The Dust Man wishes you a Happy Christmas.

Name	*Room*	*Amount*
Mrs. Dexter	4	2/6
Mr. Galsworth	10	2/6
P. D. Kitteridge	7	2/6

I wrote on a new line. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." JOHN 2/6

On returning home that night I found my landlady had given me a fortnight's notice and so was forced to seek my present dwelling.

I rang the bell, the landlady's son came to the door and I was immediately startled by his strange appearance. He is constantly dressed in a morning suit with a dark tie. His hair

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is slicked down tight as possible and drawn straight back from the forehead to such a degree that it seems pasted strand by strand to the skin on top of his skull. His face is pimply, long, triangular and contorted by an inane and perpetual smile. His voice is high, shrill and piercingly loud, like that of a young child in an hysterical fit. It was more than a month before I could distinguish his voice from his mother's on the telephone.

As soon as he opened the door and heard I'd come about the room he spun round, put his head down and raced up the stairs one at a time his arms pumping madly.

"It's the room!" he screamed, "it's the room!" He screamed this repeatedly as he raced up four flights of stairs to where his mother was emptying gas meters on the top floor. It made a fearful impression.

In the first place, his legs are too long for him to race up the stairs one at a time. He is capable of taking them two or even three at a time and it only gives a comic effect the way he does it now. He seems to be pumping away like fury and getting nowhere. One begins to think it all a satanically sarcastic act, as though he were satirizing the manner in which an idiot runs up stairs, or even satirizing all mankind.

On first hearing him scream, "It's the room! It's the room!' I was struck by the feeling that his joy was far too great. Why should he be so elated? Was there something wrong with the room? Was there something wrong with him?

But on seeing the room itself I knew idiot or not I should have to take it, for it included a storage tunnel which ran under the street. It was a barrel vault twenty feet deep by four feet high, the perfect spot for a mural I'd been planning. I am a painter, by the way, one of the last.

I saw very little of him during the first month I was here for he stays in his mother's room day and night leering at the television set and rarely ventures forth except to attend the switchboard or answer the door. However, even without seeing him I heard enough to keep my imagination dancing as merry a jig as ever one could wish.

I have an active imagination in any case. And once it's set

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in motion there's nothing I can do to stop it. In fact, all I have to do is close my eyes and I soon see such a kaleidoscope of visions that I no longer know what is real and what is not. Confusion follows, and the feeling that one is carrying a forehead full of hysteria directly behind one's eyebrows.

He calls his mother by her last name with a sort of mock serious half sarcastic sneer. It's beyond anything. You would have to hear it in order to believe it.

"Baxter," he screams with a strange laugh. His mother's name is Daphne Baxter. "Number ten wants Mrs. Baxter."

Impossible to know whether he's laughing at Number ten or at his mother. In fact, there's something Oriental about him. He seems to know a great deal more than he's willing to tell; holding most of himself in reserve.

For example, you give him a phone number to ring and doubt he'll get it right. You are anxious to repeat it several times in order to drive it into his head, as indeed you have to do when his mother tends the switchboard. But this fantastic fellow always gets it right the first time. You needn't repeat it even once. Furthermore, the switchboard is directly outside my door and it seems much too formal to ring for him when all I would actually have to do is call out to him. Yet he never says a word about this. He goes to the switchboard with his usual smile and carries out the same procedure he would use if I were phoning from a room upstairs. This gives me the feeling that he's playing some sort of game and I begin to wonder whether he's not much wiser than I; deceiving me now with simulated madness the better to trick me later. I arrive almost at the point of admiring him for his genius and then everything is shattered at 6 : 15 the following morning when he is stricken with another nightmare and falls to screaming again.

But then one day the doorbell rang and he raced upstairs to answer in his typically excited state. The caller asked for someone in the house and the landlady's son left him waiting in the vestibule while he rushed back down to the switchboard, connected the wires and began turning the crank that rings the bells in the rooms. He churned it furiously. I heard

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the handle hum. But no answer. He took to churning it again more frantically than ever.

"Is he home?" he screamed to his mother in a terrible pitch of excitement. "Is he home?"

I flew into the storage vault, slammed the door behind me and began scraping at the muck and sediment that coated the walls.

Was *who* home? How was his mother to know who the unknown caller at the door had asked for? I began singing the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony at the top of my lungs. That man has often come to my rescue.

Here was a perfect example of madness induced by machines and the miracle of modern technology. The difficulty is that we have the benefits of this pair without understanding how they work. Clearly, the landlady's son had fallen victim to the discrepancy. If he could churn a handle in the basement and have a bell ring up on the fourth floor without understanding the connection, why should his mother be unable to read his mind? I don't find it at all unsettling if people rave continuously, torture cats or claim to be Napoleon. Complete insanity is not disturbing. It's this partial insanity, this missing of one seemingly unimportant link...

Now this afternoon I saw a gentleman drop dead inside an art gallery in the following fashion. I entered the room and the moment I'd set foot inside his head struck the floor, his spectacles hit the air vent and his wife fell flat on top of him. She'd been holding him by the arm and was too startled to extricate herself.

But let me explain what I was doing in the art gallery in the first place. I offended my landlady this morning. It was entirely unintentional. It was because my sensitivity forced me to seem insensitive. Impossible? Nonsense. I can give any number of examples.

Some months ago I had occasion to appear for an interview before a gentleman who was over eighty years of age and rather ashamed of it. At one point he indicated a painting over the fireplace and asked me what I thought of it. But I couldn't see the painting. Indeed the place was so poorly lit I

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could barely see the fireplace. I informed him of that. He nodded his head. Then he got slowly up from his chair and dragged himself to a far corner of the room where there stood a ponderous floor lamp. This he picked up and began carrying toward the fireplace.

The lamp was clearly much too heavy. He was gasping like a galley slave. Yet to offer assistance was to call him feeble. I stayed glued to my chair. Then my imagination began to work. Perhaps the room was poorly lit on purpose. Perhaps he did this everyday. Was it even a religious rite? Was the lamp the timber of his cross?

A frightful calamity then occurred. He stumbled. The lamp dropped from his grasp and smashed to fragments on the floor.

I endeavored not to notice. But the lamp was over six feet tall and hung with dozens of quadrangular crystals. It was impossible not to notice. Not only was the initial crash itself enormous, but it was followed by an orchestration of quadrangular crystals, breaking, colliding and bouncing across the floor. One bounced off the top of my shoe and landed in the left cuff of my trousers.

Instead of ignoring it I pointed to the floor, slapped my knee and laughed hilariously. Let me emphasize that this was not insensitivity. It was the reverse. I was trying to imply it was his awkwardness he ought feel ashamed of and not his great age. I didn't just chuckle politely either. I forced myself to roar with gales of laughter in case age had made him hard of hearing. I felt that the harder I laughed the younger he would feel. Negroes affect me in the same way. I have a tendency to be deliberately impolite to them to prevent them feeling that I pity them for their color.

However he did not react as I'd hoped he would. He turned chalk white and absolutely furious. His lips began quivering at such a rate that I grew genuinely alarmed. He staggered back to his desk and pushed a panel of buttons one by one. Doors flew open on every side of me. It was one of those eighteenth century rooms with pairs and triplets and quartets of doors each with a corresponding pair, triplet or quartet on

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the opposite side of the room. The very walls of the place appeared to swing backward to the vanishing point and I felt a distinct sensation of vacuum. It was really quite fantastic. Do you know *The Bearing Of The Body Of St. Mark?* But don't let me get started on Tintoretto whatever you do. In the next instant hordes of people came pouring down about my ears informing me that my interview was at an end.

The incident with my landlady was similar in character. She was counting up the shillings from the gas meters.

"A very good morning Mrs. Baxter," said I, coming up behind her. "I've finally finished scraping the muck from the walls and shall begin to paint this afternoon."

No answer. That was this morning at eleven o'clock.

I spoke more rapidly than ever. "I'm off to fetch the paints right now and shall probably be having a model in. We won't want tea, thank you very much. Please don't let it disturb you."

She was not, however, flustered by my brash and hearty manner.

"Which muck?" she inquired after she had done stacking another pile of shilling pieces.

She knew very well which muck. English landladies are a subtle lot. They plunge right to the heart of matters and confound one by speaking of something entirely different. Let me confess it. In addition to sensitivity I have the second vice of burning lust and am a puritan at heart. I try not to be ashamed of my lust. Indeed I try to be proud of it and take constant pains to preach it—not for myself, incidentally, but for all mankind. However, the fact of the matter is that these two vices are engaged in eternal strife inside my soul and it is only by consciously feeding the fires of my lust that I can defeat my sensitivity. Especially when Mrs. Baxter looks me in the eye.

But doesn't every artist seek the ideal woman? Naturally this is a foolish quest. Everyone knows that very well. But is there not a long tradition for it? See to what ends different artists have gone. Duerer tried to construct her by geometry;

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Apelles by taking seven ideal parts from seven separate virgins. And I claim that every woman, no matter how ugly or even deformed, has some touch of the ideal about her. I claim that I can find something of beauty in every woman be it only her nose, her ankles, some gesture she makes or her way of walking. Must this convict me of indiscriminate lechery? Could it not simply be that I am more discerning? The idea gave me a sudden burst of courage.

"In fact I might find it necessary to use more than one model," I said to Mrs. Baxter. "I might find it necessary to use a whole bevy of models, Mrs. Baxter, a tantalizing array of unclad feminine pulchritude as they say on Great Windmill Street. But don't let that disturb you either. The tradition goes back to classical times. Raphael said the same. Don't take my word for it. The documents are all in the British Museum. Besides, imagine the feelings of Leonardo's landlady."

"I have a married daughter," Mrs. Baxter cried. "With two young children of her own."

This last burst from her lips and took me completely by surprise. But was it any wonder the woman was in a nervous state? For two months now I had been awakened every morning spot at 6:15 by the hysterical screams of her half-mad son, and never once a word from me about it. Apparently I thought it quite normal that she get idiot offspring. No doubt I suspected some chaos in her genes. Which was absolutely not the case as I immediately tried to demonstrate though by means of indirection. Which is to say I did not refer to her daughter.

"These grandchildren of yours, Mrs. Baxter," I said, What is their sex may I ask?" The woman didn't really have a daughter. She'd invented one specially for the occasion, and anything I said about this imaginary creature would simply serve to multiply her shame.

"I beg your pardon?" Mrs. Baxter said. There are two dozen different ways of saying that in England. Mrs. Baxter said it in a neutral way which meant she'd not understood the purpose of my question.

I hastened to explain myself. "If they are of the female sex,"

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I said, "perhaps I can make use of them. I assume they are young and still in possession of their purity."

"I *beg* your pardon," she said again, with so heavy an accent on the 'beg' this time that I understood she was growing indignant.

"I only meant to remark, Mrs. Baxter, that the world no longer seems to value purity these days, does it, Mrs. Baxter? Surely you have noticed this yourself. In fact I often think it indicative of a total moral collapse. But you and I would I hope agree, would we not Mrs. Baxter, that purity is a young lady's greatest asset? Purity and dowry, Mrs. Baxter, purity and dowry. Words no longer understood in modern times. But I understand them and so do you, don't you, Mrs. Baxter? We are of the old school. And I would say that the greater of these is purity, wouldn't you agree? Now, Mrs. Baxter, please don't feel that I underestimate the importance of a good fat dowry. After all, one can't live on love, but it's still my firm belief that the act of deflor..."

But by this time Mrs. Baxter was sweeping the shillings into a brown cloth bag, no longer bothering to count them.

"I beg your *pardon*," she said again and I perceived a note of panic in her tone.

"But Mrs. Baxter," I said, "Mrs. Baxter you must permit me to finish my explanation," reaching out to detain her.

"I beg your pardon." This time she accented all four words.

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In fact she actually screamed them if the truth be known and slammed the door of her son's room right in my face.

Not fifteen minutes later I was amused by a strange coincidence. I was on the underground, standing because there were no empty seats. Then someone stood up and I was about to sit down when I noticed two schoolgirls standing just behind me. I bowed to them and offered them the empty seat. They were about twelve years old and they giggled, then finally the prettier of them took the empty seat. I was quite elated because I like to hear schoolgirls giggle. In fact I like all people to react to all things. Then the girl who'd taken the seat slapped her lap as a signal for her friend to rest her books there and I pretended that I was going to sit upon her lap. They giggled again and I was pleased. But the man to her right frowned imperceptibly and ruffled his EVENING STANDARD. I hate imperceptible frowns. I hate all impersonal signs of disapproval. Indeed I think I hate all impersonality altogether.

And it set me to thinking. I began to think that in another year or two the schoolgirls wouldn't giggle anymore—for when schoolgirls reach the age of fourteen in England something happens which seems to shut off all their giggles. I began to think it was actually my duty to these two schoolgirls to get a reaction, which is to say a *personal* reaction from the gentleman with the EVENING STANDARD. I could feel this feeling grow steadily stronger and began to think that I was going to act upon it. A moment later this had changed to a positive conviction that I was about to commit some action—I knew not what—which would ensure that *these* two schoolgirls would continue to giggle for the rest of their lives.

The desire to work great and sweeping changes in the world is another that comes upon me frequently. If I allowed it to, it would take up all my time.

We are taught that nation shall not lift up sword against nation. "True!" we cry, and we jump up, rush outside, gather all the swords together and melt them into plowshares. Futile. Does one remove the dead fly from the

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apothecary's ointment by holding one's nose? Of course not. One must dip down into the ointment and pluck out the fly with one's fingers. What is my solution? Keep the swords; end the nations! How? By dropping tariffs, erasing boundaries, freeing land, burning passports and allowing people to wander where they will. Is all this foolish, naive and idealistic? Certainly it is. I know it as well as you do. I do not really expect to see any of it in my lifetime. I therefore have other projects as well.

Last week I bought a package of pickled green tomatoes. They came in a plastic bag that was filled with brine. Generally I am suspicious of all food that comes in plastic bags. However this particular plastic bag bore the following legend: "That straight from the barrel flavor," and I believed it.

Now when I was a child I was terribly fond of pickled green tomatoes. There was a small shop not far from my house that had a great brown barrel of them set right in the middle of the floor and my parents would always buy me one whenever we entered that place which was not infrequently. So fond was I in fact of these pickled green tomatoes that my parents would often tell me I was going to turn *into* a pickled green tomato. But some years ago that small shop and all the other small shops nearby were replaced by an enormous and impersonal supermarket which sells everything from bread and butter to books and basketballs. Oh it sells pickled green tomatoes too, but the kind that comes in bottles with a very different taste.

And so last week when I read the legend on the plastic bag, "That straight from the barrel flavor," I was overjoyed and could scarcely wait to return to my room to taste them. I was infuriated however, to find that the legend on the bag was a lie. These pickled green tomatoes I'd purchased had not a straight from the barrel flavor at all, but rather one that was very close to the sort the supermarket sells in bottles. I sat right down at my desk to write a letter to the manufacturer.

Sir,

This evening I purchased a plastic bag of... (I suppress the

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name of the manufacturer) pickled green tomatoes, and found on eating the first that I had been deceived by the legend printed on the bag which claims that they have "That straight from the barrel flavor."

I regret to inform you that your pickled green tomatoes have nothing like a straight from the barrel flavor. To the contrary. They taste suspiciously like the pickled green tomatoes that supermarkets sell in bottles.

Perhaps I should make clear at this point first, that when I was a child there was a shop near my home that used to sell pickled green tomatoes *directly* from a brown wooden barrel that stood in the center of the floor, and second, that I used to eat them so frequently that my parents told me that I was going to turn *in*to a pickled green tomato. Do not mistake my meaning. I am not trying to place myself on familiar terms with you. I only mention this to show you that I am qualified to judge in the question of whether your pickled green tomatoes, have or do not have a straight from the barrel flavor.

It is my considered judgement that they do not. This is very grave.

I am also writing to the Secretary of the Home Office and to the Consulate of the United States of America, of which country I am a citizen. Nor will I hesitate to turn to the newspapers, for I have noticed how you anonymous gentlemen have driven all the small shop-keepers into bankruptcy. I have also noticed that the feeling of *personal responsibility* between the shop-keeper and the customer has vanished as a result. It is the vice of our time. A great wave of impersonality is inexorably engulfing the entire world and shall soon have inundated us utterly. Previously I have refrained from attacking you but now my evidence is complete. You may take this letter as a Declaration of War.

Naturally I did not sign this letter. If you sign such letters they only send you a mimeographed letter of apology and a complimentary plastic package of their pickled green tomatoes.

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However I began to smile at the gentleman reading the EVENING STANDARD. I vowed to get some reaction from him if it meant following him to the end of the line, nay, to the very doors of his house. And I was determined that it be a personal reaction, something more than "I beg your pardon," as Mrs. Baxter is so fond of saying.

But there was no reaction. He ignored my smile.

Next I turned to music. That is, I leaned forward at the waist, thrust my chin over the top of his EVENING STANDARD and with all the power of my lungs began trilling the *Grosse Fuge* directly into his left ear. This I found a most appropriate action for that piece has always reminded me of four cars of the underground pursuing one another through a tunnel madly anyhow. I took the part of the first violin.

"Da dum da dum, da dum da dum, da dum *da da da da* dum da dum."

I whistled with all my strength. It was a hurricane in miniscule. If the sound didn't stir him the force of the wind itself was enough to set his inchus, malleus and stapes spinning like so many paper pin-wheels.

But would you believe it? Even as I did this perhaps aggressive action I still felt forgiveness in my soul? It's true. Let me confess it quite frankly. I wanted him to leap from his seat and throw his EVENING STANDARD into the air. I wanted him to throw his arms about me in brotherly love and to cry, "Yes, of course! That is it exactly. It's four cars of the underground. He has given us the sound of his deafness as the personification of all disaster." I saw him tearing off his jacket and bestowing all his goods to feed the poor. I saw him giving his body to be burned.

In fact, however, he continued reading the EVENING STANDARD. No reaction whatever. He might have been earless and absolutely deaf.

You will think me rude no doubt, and say that one cannot reform the world by rudeness and by writing indignant letters to manufacturers of pickled green tomatoes, but my friend, I saw a gentleman drop dead in an art gallery this afternoon, and can testify that all about us and on every hand

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there is blackness and bitterness, death and despair. I have lived among the poor and seen their faces crushed into the dust and I have lived among the rich and watched their wretchedness. And I too, like Apelles and Raphael, have also an ideal woman of my own and one part of her is the giggle of a schoolgirl.

So I took a half crown from my pocket and began flipping it up into the air and catching it right before his face. The schoolgirls giggled again but the man continued reading the EVENING STANDARD. Then I almost despaired of forcing a reaction and thought how little it meant, for even if everything in the world were right, even if our statesmen did not deceive and ignore us, even if we might not be bombed into a jelly tomorrow by enemies we've never offended, even if the streets were not packed with people each at every other's throat to no avail, there would still be despair and darkness because death is the end of life.

And in my despair I missed the falling coin and it dropped into his lap and landed on the tail of his topcoat from whence I picked it up still with no reaction.

Then my very failure gave me courage and I thought that at least I should make him say "I beg your pardon," just as Mrs. Baxter had done. I looked down into his lap and saw the button of his topcoat. To my vast amusement it reminded me of the coin I'd been flipping up before his face. It was gray in color like the coin and of approximately the same diameter. So I reached down into his lap once more and attempted to pick the button up. Which of course, I could not do for it was sewed on tight as the EVENING STANDARD itself.

He looked at me then and I watched his lips with eager anticipation. However I was once more disappointed. He did not say "I beg your pardon," after all. Instead he pulled his topcoat button free of my grasp and inquired, "Do you mind?" There are also two dozen different ways of saying that in England.

I got off the underground at the next stop resolving to forget all about reformation of the world and to throw myself back into my art. As disappointing as art is, life is even more

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so for life is more imperfect. I cannot be out on the street five minutes before some abomination attracts my notice and offends me to the very core of my soul.

"Patience!" you say. "Forbearance! Tolerance! Understanding!" But I know all that. No one regrets his follies more than I do, yet regret after the event does not prevent its occurrence.

In fact, the only solution is to be God at the Last Judgement. Don't think I'd be cruel. I'd put everybody into heaven (whatever that might be) in the end, although first I'd give some of the evildoers a fright. At one time I thought it would be good to have an office that would be open for two hours every afternoon, at which time people could come and tell you their troubles. But that wouldn't do either, for it's a full-time job. Of course, there is no true solution—or is there?

I am open to suggestions for improvement of the universe. But before you deluge me with your ideas permit me to ask you one question. How can you be sure that the evil you ask me to eliminate will not be replaced by some new evil equally loathesome?

After all, what are you? I shall tell you what you are. You are a leaf in a tree. In the summertime of your hope the sap flows thick and you cry, "No tempest shall ever shake me from this tree. I will hang on forever and never let go, even if I am the only leaf left alive in all the forest."

This is all in the summertime when the sap flows thick. But then the autumn comes and the sap runs dry. First you turn yellow, then you turn brown, and soon your attitude has changed entirely.

"What's the use?" you ask yourself. "The winter will get me in the end. My stubbornness is of no avail for finally I *must* let go and tumble to the ground."

What is the thing that you lack? What is it that has made you break your noble resolutions? The thing you lack my friend, is faith. If all the leaves had only faith I can assure you that the entire forest would be evergreen.

Or perhaps you doubt me? Do not doubt me. I know all these things because I am a pelican of the wilderness. Do not

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think I boast of it. It is nothing to boast about. A pelican of the wilderness is simply one who has looked downward into the pit and whose courage has failed.

But permit me to describe the mural with which I plan to decorate the storage tunnel adjoining my room; al fresco if I can find the money, al secco if I can't. It shall be a rendition of the nature of the universe in anthropomorphic terms and shall begin with a mother and child, all in red and blue (which are for me, the most material colors), the child enclosed by the form of the mother as in a Madonna of Correggio. Behind and above these two and enclosing the form of the mother just as the mother's form encloses the form of the child, shall be a beautiful goddess, a rendition of the ideal woman. Behind this beautiful goddess, and enclosing her form shall be a prisoner of ochre, umbre and venetian red with white and staring eyes. He is the protagonist of the painting, drawn from the beholder's point of view, and is the first in the chain to understand that the child thinks the mother is all the rest of the universe, and that the mother thinks the beautiful goddess is all the rest of the universe, and that both of them are mistaken.

Now behind this prisoner in ochre, there is an apalling demon frowning down upon him. I have not decided upon the flesh color, but the eyes are black and green. The prisoner in ochre is staring up at the demon out of the corner of his eye but it is not the demon who disturbs him, apalling though this demon is. Rather, he is disturbed by the thing that might be behind the demon, and by the thing behind the thing behind him.

"How many more are there?" he wonders. "Where does the progression end?"

But one cannot see. One can only guess.

I shall not bore you with this fellow's past history, but he did not always realize that he was a prisoner. Quite to the contrary, this fellow once believed he was a god. He believed that he was Atlas, and that he was capable of standing at the very edge of the pit and looking downward with the weight of the entire world upon his shoulders. (He is a

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muscular fellow, strong as a bull and with an inclination to be heroic.) On doing so, however, he suddenly discovered that he was not Atlas—far from it—and that despite his enormous outward strength he was weak as a babe inside his soul. It then appeared that not only could he carry nothing upon his shoulders, but could barely bear to stand erect himself. He found that he was among the feeblest of men, that his feet were clay, and now even though he knows that all is vanity and that there is nothing therefore, to be afraid of, his mouth is dry and his heart is pounding and the very joints of his bones are paralyzed in a flood of blind and brutish fears. A true pelican of the wilderness in short, and as prime an example of the species as my art can muster...

Do you know the sole, final and only favor this fellow would ask of God? He would not ask for rain or for sunshine, nor for prosperity, wisdom, happiness or any other sort of special interest. He's beyond all that. He cares for none of those things and if he did would be willing to do them for himself. No, the only favor this fellow would ask is for God to be. If God would grant him that he would gladly take his chances with the rest.

I make no pretenses. I planned to give this prisoner in ochre my own features; however, I first needed a model for the mother of the child and went straight to a phone booth and rang up the girl at the library who on two separate occasions has put my card into the pocket upside down. The first time she did it I thought nothing of it. I only corrected it, turned it right way up and assumed that she'd been careless. The second time however, I looked her straight in the eye and she did not drop her gaze.

"Hello," I said, pushing button A. "Is this the girl at the outdesk?"

She said that it was, and I told her my name.

"I beg your pardon?" she said.

"You know," I said, "the fellow whose card you keep putting in upside down. Why not drop over this afternoon? I don't for a moment suppose that Mrs. Baxter—she's my landlady—will be elated at your visit, but perhaps she'll feel

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a bit relieved that I'm not having a whole horde of women in, as I implied I might. I'm also counting upon her desire to vindicate her genes to me. In fact she may even welcome your visit as evidence of the sexual safety of two imaginary granddaughters she invented in a conversation we had not an hour ago." This last I said sarcastically.

"I beg your pardon?" she repeated.

I told her it was wrong to begin our association with pretense and hypocrisy.

"Listen," she said. "Just who is this and what do you want?

"I wasn't snubbing you, you know. It's just that I've never seen that trick with the library card before. Besides men are always a bit shocked by women who make the first advances."

"If you don't ring off this instant," she said, "I'm going to call a constable."

"Constable be damned!" I cried and hung up on her.

It was then I decided to go to the art gallery. No doubt this will seem a retreat on my part. Let me emphasize that it was not. It was an orderly withdrawal. The distinction is an important one, for I have been battling along these lines for over thirty years and have never retreated once and my withdrawals have all been orderly in nature.

"Then what are you doing in England in the first place?"

This is the voice of the modern negativists. Notice how they rush to support the status quo. Every man to his plow! Every woman to her spinning wheel! Everything else is an escape. One is not oneself any longer. One is now one's mental diseases. I beg to differ. My existence is positive. I am not running away. I am going toward.

The fact of the matter is that I made the rounds of the employment agencies of New York, thinking to expose to them the error of their ways. The first asked me my qualifications ability-wise.

"I can mend the broken pitcher," I said, "and repair the broken wheel."

"Sorry," they said, for they were dense enough to take this literally, "There's no demand for that sort of thing these

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days." And they sent me to another place where I was asked for my background experience-wise.

I told them that I had lived in the country where the almond tree had flourished and in the city where the sound of the grinding was low, and that I had found a way to see light even when those who look out of the windows were darkened.

"Yes, yes," they said. "That's all very well we're sure, but what are your intentions ultimate purpose-wise?"

"My ultimate purpose," I replied, beginning to grow annoyed with their obtuseness, "is to lead people out of the wilderness."

"Oh," they said. "The wilderness, huh?" And they nodded to one another. "Now just which wilderness was that Sir?"

"Why the wilderness that's all about you," I cried, very much to their surprise.

"There must be some mistake," they said. "There's no wilderness all about us. Are you sure you've come to the right place? Why don't you try us again next week? But come a little later in the day."

"It's late enough in the day already," I told them and that's when I came away to England.

It's all very well to say I should not let the reactions of girls at out-desks discourage me. But I am a human being and possessed of a liberal share of every human weakness. If you thought me immune to transient troubles you were quite mistaken, for the vanity of the largest mountain is written in the smallest grain of sand and even that smallest grain of sand can prompt the cello to speak inside my soul and ask me "Muss es *sein*?"

Of course I could have phoned a host of other girls, the cashier at the cinema who never pushes my ticket out to me, but leaves it in the machine so that I have to reach inside her booth to get it, but I didn't, lest all my dreams prove empty as my mailbox did on Christmas Day.

Instead I entered the art gallery to seek peace and a spur to inspiration and no sooner had I set foot inside than I saw a gentleman drop dead right before my eyes. My foot and his

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head touched the floor almost simultaneously. It made a dreadful thump, his spectacles hit the air-vent and his wife fell flat on top of him. She had been holding him by the arm and now her arm was pinned beneath him.

I thought that he had fainted and I was closest, so I bent over, loosened his tie and unbuttoned his shirt, then started to lift his legs. I noticed that his face was getting redder by the second.

"It's his heart," his wife said to me. She was still lying flat on top of him.

"If it's his heart," I said, "then I don't know what to do. We'd better call a doctor."

"Should I call a doctor?" someone behind me asked and I said that he should.

"He has a special doctor," his wife said. She hadn't moved an inch and was speaking as calmly as anyone I've ever heard in all my life. However her cheeks were twitching.

"Why don't you stand up?" I asked her.

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," she answered. Then I saw that her arm was pinned beneath him and I pulled it out and helped her to her feet. The red of her husband's face was now so deep in tone that it was fast approaching purple. He was lying flat on his back with his arms stretched palm upward down at his side. The whites of his eyes were showing, his lips were parted and he breathed in long loud gasps once every eight or ten seconds. Each time he took a breath an enormous rasping sound echoed throughout the gallery.

His wife was staring vacantly.

"Do you know the doctor's phone number?" I asked her.

"I don't remember it."

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes." She was staring straight ahead and from time to time her cheeks twitched.

"What is his name?"

She was about sixty years old and had gray hair and a kind and motherly face. She shook her head. "I can't remember

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now." I began to see that she was deliberately trying to keep a tight hold upon herself.

"Do you have it written down someplace?"

"In my purse."

I began to look for her purse which she wasn't carrying. I looked about the floor but didn't see it. "Does anyone see a purse?" I asked, because there were some thirty people standing round us.

"Underneath," someone said. "Look underneath."

"Underneath?" I said. "Underneath what?"

"Underneath the bloke on the floor," he said.

The handle of it was just sticking out. It had slipped off her arm when he'd fallen. I got it out and gave it her. The purple of his face was approaching blue and he was breathing more slowly.

She took a card out of her purse and handed it to me. Her husband's breath made a sudden squirking sound like the last dregs draining from a bathtub.

"Why don't you come to the telephone?" I asked her, and took her arm. She came like a sleepwalker.

She bumped into another lady as I led her through the spectators.

"Sorry," she said. She was doing a perfect job of keeping absolutely calm except that her cheeks continued to twitch and she could not see where she was going. She thought it would be inconsiderate to give in to her emotions. Her eyes were wet but she would not permit herself to cry.

I asked her name then dialed the doctor and told him what had happened. I tried to describe the symptoms fully and clearly.

"Finished, is he?" the doctor asked.

"I don't know whether he is or not. I am not a doctor," I answered trying to remind him of his duty.

His voice became more official. "Has someone sent for an ambulance?"

I said it was on its way.

"That's all that can be done at the moment," he told me.

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"I don't know how you can be sure of that unless you come here and see for yourself."

"I know the case," he said. "Not a blessed thing to do.'

I lost all patience. "You'd better come here right away. His wife is still alive."

"I beg your pardon."

"His wife is in a state of shock and may collapse at any moment."

"His wife is not my patient."

"Anyone ill is your patient. Isn't that the Hippocratic Oath?"

"I'll be judge of that," he said. "Do you *mind*?"

His voice suddenly reminded me of the cello and my answer was almost reflexive. I spoke like the first violin. "I *do* mind."

But his question was rhetorical and he'd rung off before I could answer.

I turned to his wife again and was about to explain that she had better find a doctor who had fallen less victim to the impersonality of the Welfare State. However I didn't get the chance.

"He's got pills," his wife said to me. She'd been waiting to say that for several moments but was too polite to interrupt me while I was speaking on the phone.

"Who's got pills?" I asked her.

"My husband," she said. "In his overcoat pocket."

"Would you like to go back?"

"I really think I'd better. I should've thought to give him one before we came away. They're for his heart you know." The woman spoke with a dignity that was of the nineteenth century.

He was lying where we'd left him, in a corner of the gallery, beneath a painting of a sailboat in the sunset. He was lying all alone except for the people who'd come to look at the painting. His wife had to excuse herself more than once in order to get past them. They walked to where his head was resting on the floor, stopped, straddled his head with their shoes and looked at the painting over his dead body.

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It wasn't curiosity. I can assure you of that. Would that it had been for curiosity is understandable. I have seen people look at dead men before and have done the same myself. Dead men have a certain fascination and one can understand the cause. People who are still alive find it difficult to believe in dead men and that is a perfectly human feeling. But these people didn't give him so much as a glance. All these people were doing was looking over his dead body just to prove that they could take it.

"Look," they were saying. "See how imperturbable I am? Here's a dead bugger lying just at my feet and it doesn't bother me a bit. I can straddle his dead head with my shoes and stick my ruddy chin half way across his dead body. I've been through the blitz I have, and nothing is now beyond me. Why here's his missus crouching just at my feet ransacking his ruddy pockets for heart pills so that she can stick them between his ruddy dead lips and pretend he's still alive and I don't even blink, I don't. I go right on looking at the ruddy painting as though none of this had ruddy happened."

Then a crippled man with a big jaw, bald head, and glasses came over. He rested the tip of his cane next to the dead man's ear and began squinting at the painting too. He thought he was the noblest one of all. He even had an angry expression on his face.

"I'm one up on all the rest. I'm a cripple and I walk with a cane and not only can I look at an ugly painting over a dead body along with the fittest man among you, but I can even be angry with his ruddy corpse for forcing me to squint."

I looked down and the man's wife was shaking pill after pill from the bottle and feeding them into his mouth as one might feed nickels into a slot machine. Now, every color of the spectrum was in the man's face. It was a phenomenon I had not previously seen in nature. It reminded me of Rubens or Baroccio, but was not really like either of these. It were as though a painter of death had borrowed their colors and were out to expose all love of nature, even every natural thing as absurd and frivolous vanity. The colors seemed vulgar and disgusting; a mockery, a sacrilege, a perverted trick deliber-

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ately intended to offend every human sensibility and obliterate all further desire for life, because beneath them, through them, around them and above them was an ashen gray pallor that shone with shocking brightness. I couldn't look at it and I couldn't look away. It seemed to beckon toward me with long bony fingers and leering lips, to solicit me like an ancient prostitute with brightly painted face. My imagination

began to gyrate wildly and I suddenly saw that the entire world was coated with a thick slime of this same gray pallor and that I should never be able to avoid it no matter where I turned. When I looked at the people about me I saw that all the people were corpses. I saw that they were mocking me and teasing me and only pretending to be alive.

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When I looked at the walls I saw that the walls were dust.

It was too much for me. I was afraid that my head would burst. I had to do something and so I tapped the cripple on top of his bald skull and told him to go away in the most vulgar possible terms.

He looked over his shoulder with a surprised expression and said, "I beg your pardon."

"Don't beg my pardon you crippled son of a bitch," I cried. "How would you like me to kick you right in your crippled leg?"

But then to my horror the dead man's widow began to weep and wail. Soon she'd given way completely and thrown herself across his body.

The crippled man gave me a contemptuous look for speaking out of turn and rudely. Nor was he the only one. A dozen others behind me began to cluck their tongues and say that a dead man was no excuse for shouting in an art gallery, and that even a foreigner ought to know better than that, and that there would always be an England. It was like a game of musical chairs and I was the one left standing.

But I found myself incapable of feeling rage. The ability of anger fled me and I felt the juices of despair begin to flood my veins. Despair comes upon me in the form of a poisonous juice that originates in my stomach and flows from there throughout my entire body. And when I say despair do not think I mean melancholy with which it is often confounded. Melancholy is a pleasant feeling. It enhances one's sense of the importance of life without endangering survival. It is a gentle feeling, feminine in nature. In a word, it is a luxury. Despair is quite another matter. (For the difference between melancholy and despair, compare the viola at the beginning of the third movement of the last quartet with the cello at the beginning of the fourth.)

A further distinction must be made between true despair and despair of the false, specious and ephemeral sort which is often mistaken for the genuine article by dozens and dozens of suicides. I submit that any suicide who leaves a note is killing himself under false pretenses. You will feel this to be

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an unimportant distinction, but may I have your leave to inform you that not even the society of suicides is a classless one? Nor do not let my merry tone deceive you. Suicides who leave notes must be classed with pregnant women who tie weights to their legs and drown themselves in rivers, with students who climb on top of tables and hang themselves by the neck after failing their examinations, and with stock-brokers who shoot themselves behind the ear with pistols because the market has collapsed.

I foresee that many people will call me a narrow-minded snob and accuse me of a lack of generosity, but may I ask them to contain themselves until after they have considered the case of the aristocrat of suicides. Who is the aristocrat of suicides? The aristocrat of suicides is the man who kills himself for no apparent reason at all.

If the pregnant woman had not been pregnant she would not have killed herself. Do you agree? The reasons of the student and stock-broker were equally light. The despair of each had each its remedy, but genuine despair has absolutely no remedy whatsoever. Genuine despair cannot be corrected. Genuine despair is constant and eternal. (That is not to say one feels it constantly, but that its nature never changes.) Genuine despair is its own first cause, noble, pure, primeval, but above all universal. One does not leave a note because there is no one to whom to leave it. In short, the aristocrat of suicides kills himself because he *is* and because he does not care *to be*.

The overwhelming majority of people would not even consider this a valid reason. That is why the aristocracy of suicides is the only true one. It is by definition, exclusive, open only to true connoisseurs of life and at whichever time they care to enroll themselves.

The instant I felt these juices leave my stomach and enter my veins I unleashed my lust, abandoned the art gallery and rushed out into the street. My first stop was at a chemist to pick up a package of contraceptives.

It will not have escaped your notice that I am introverted, shy and painfully self-conscious. I can generally drown these drawbacks in bravado, however, my bravado never fails to

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desert me when it comes to buying rubbers. To make matters infinitely worse, there were three women clerks and only one man. I kept waiting at the far end of the counter for the man to come to serve me. I avoided the women clerks like the plague. But the man clerk never seemed to come anywhere near me. Even when it was obviously my turn and even when my turn had passed me more than once he still did not come near me. I avoided the women by scrutinizing all the displays bottle by bottle and tube by tube. I scrutinized those displays for well over twenty minutes and still he did not come near me. I was, of course, loth to call out to him, lest the very act of calling out reveal the true nature of my intended purchase. After I had been in the shop for more than half an hour and was both sweating with anxiety and hopping with nervous anticipation I suddenly saw him start directly toward me. I took an enormous breath. But when he came even with me I found myself deprived of speech. Nor did he even pause or give me a glance. He passed me right by and disappeared into the back of the shop for his tea break. I was furious.

"Young lady!" I cried at the one who was farthest away. "Would you be so good as to fetch me a packet of three rubber contraceptives? I'd prefer the kind with feathers attached. I believe they're known as continental ticklers."

I then raced from the place and straight to Hyde Park which is my favorite place for making pick-ups. I was not at all particular. Any type or age would do, for I am a man capable of discovering a bit or two for beauty in the beastliest woman ever born, be it in ancient times or modern, including Medusa, Celestina, the female saints of the Antwerp School, a Jacopo da Barbari Venus, the Magdalene by Gruenewald, as well as Cunégonde herself at the house of the Prince in Propontis. Nor in the mood for subtle devices neither. I was determined to strike direct as Alexander, then get away, quick before they could call the police.

I first approached a middle-aged lady with splendid lips, but an enormous nose, witch-like chin and pock-marked cheeks, walking a mongrel dog with a wilted yellow ribbon

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round its neck. I stood straight in her path so that she was unable to ignore me and used my rhetoric on her, for it isn't your clothes that count. The English know by your accent whether you're from the landed classes.

"Madam, please do not think that I've gone blind nor that I've taken leave of my senses. I'm well aware that your nose is fully half a foot in length, that your chin is pointed as a cinquecento short sword, and that your cheeks are as filled with pits as the surface of the moon or a slice of Muenster cheese. I will be frank. Your face is a veritable forest of imperfections, but you see standing before you a man so smitten by the beauty of your lips that your every other feature is hidden from his eyes and dwarfed into total insignificance. They are like the bow of Cupid, Madam. They would make Venus wring her hands and tear her hair. Do me therefore the honor of accompanying me to my room where I shall try to pay them proper homage." Here I dropped to my knees and bleated to show desire.

"Do you *mind*?" she asked, trying to step round me.

"I *do* mind," I answered, shifting over on my knees.

"Young man I am a mother."

"Madam, I swear to you that I had not thought to call your fertility into question. It's only that I just saw a gentleman drop dead in an art gallery and am in desperate need of a woman."

"I beg your pardon," she said and turned on her heel and walked away.

But why catalogue the various incidents one by one? They were a regular *Diabelli Variations* on the theme of refusal. I approached housewives and nursemaids, shop girls and typists, one schoolteacher, two widows, three models, a trapeze artist, a sculptress, a social worker, two separate female skiffle groups, a lady who claimed to be a duchess and one recently retired policewoman.

"Lucky thing for you I ain't on the job, mate. I'd 'ave you before the magistrate, I would."

I approached a schoolgirl wearing lipstick who began to weep.

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"But why do you paint your lips then?" I asked her fiercely.

"Mummy said I could," she wailed and my heart melted. It was all her mother's fault. Another vice of our time.

I approached a woman wearing spiked heels, transparent tights and a fluorescent purple leotard who told me that I was preoccupied with sex and had ought to be locked away so that decent women could walk the streets in safety.

I said whatever came to mind; anything to get into conversation. Just as I approached a female physical culturist doing knee-bends on the lawn I heard a deafening siren begin to sound.

"What does that deafening siren mean?" I asked her.

"It's either—two o'clock," she said not losing a beat as she spoke," or else—an atomic attack—five, six."

Toward the end of the afternoon and after many dozen disappointments I came upon an American exchange student reading a book upon a bench at Rotten Row and sat myself down beside her. The name of the book was YOUR ORGASM—A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO MARRIAGE. It was divided into numbered paragraphs in the Aristotelian manner and she was on the chapter that dealt with manipulation of the clitoris.

"Well," I said, after coughing, humming and failing to gain her attention in several other ways, (for I was growing weary) "I see you're up to one of the most exciting parts."

"It's not a laughing matter," she said with no small indignation. "Do you realize that eighty-seven per cent of the working class women in Birmingham and Manchester have never achieved an orgasm?"

"A remarkable rate," I replied. "What a pity your statistics are confined to working class women alone."

"That's a very strange attitude."

"Not at all. I happen to be an advocate of female circumcision."

"Female circumcision!" she exclaimed. "How positively barbarous!"

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"Define your terms!" I cried. "Clearly you are thinking in terms of our present Western culture."

She turned pale with shame and remorse.

"Kirche, Kueche und Kinder!" I cried, but there I overstepped myself.

"Oh," she said. "I see through you. You have a subconscious fear of emasculation."

"Throw that silly book away and find a place at my feet," I said. "Instead of seeing through people I shall teach you to see the people themselves."

"Why if it were up to you, women would not be allowed to express themselves."

"Listen," I said, "I just saw a man drop dead in an art gallery."

"How perfectly disgusting! You don't want a woman. You want a mother."

"But a mother is a woman. Haven't you reached that chapter yet?"

However, my further efforts were futile. "Do you *mind*?" she said, opening to the chapter on erogenous zones and burying her nose in the text.

In the five hours I spent in Hyde Park I approached a total of from sixty to seventy women. Some of them ignored me, some of them sneered, some ran away, some turned round and walked away, two laughed, three screamed, many pushed me aside and one of them hit me with her umbrella. But in one way or another they all said, "Do you *mind*?"

And I took the part of the first violin. "I *do* mind. I *do* mind. *I do mind.*" But the cello grew ever louder inside my soul and so deep in tone as to approach a contrabasso.

Soon it was dark and all the birds were silent and the governesses had gathered up their children, and the housewives were gone home to greet their husbands and the park was then deserted. I started home along Baker Street, and the window lights were darkened now that all the shops were closed, and all along the street there was not a soul beside me. It was after six o'clock and the people were all in their houses

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and I was left alone and very weary for even my lust had failed me and I found my life a burden.

Suddenly I saw a woman walking. She had long hair and a Grecian gown and her back was toward me. The stuff of the gown was thin as silk and white as snow and had dozens of slender, vertical folds as in a classical statue. I could scarcely credit my eyes, for it was a cold day, and one does not wear white in London, and I had not seen where she'd come from. I would have been less amazed to see a mermaid than to see a woman dressed like a classical statue and walking before me on Baker Street.

Her hair was so thick and long that it completely covered her cheeks. It covered her eyes in part as well and hid me from her sight. I was about to speak when she sensed me walking with her and shook her hair away. She studied me for a moment intensely, then inclined her head and smiled in a melancholy way.

I'd been on the verge of saying something brash. Can you understand it? Women had been turning me away from them all day, and it had made me feel abusive. I wanted to speak in such a way as to make her see she couldn't hurt me. But now I felt more wretched and miserable than ever for this showed me that I was corruptible too.

However, that was just the moment she chose to take me by the arm. No word or host of words could have helped me but that gesture melted my heart. It was everything I'd ever wanted but had never even hoped for. In fact, I couldn't believe it had really happened. I said to myself, "No, this is all a dream and I'm still in the dentist's chair," meaning that at the age of eighteen I had a tooth pulled under general anaesthetic and suffered the most realistic recollection imaginable of the time before my birth, when I and all the others were exiled in darkness on the reverse side of the shell that contains the universe.

Now there is a small hole in this shell, just large enough for a human being of average size to squeeze through, and it was our intention (myself and the other exiles) to do this and so reenter the universe. For it is not as the mystics

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would have us believe. Nothingness is not a pleasure. It is painful.

This was even less simple than it sounds, for not only is the hole itself infinitesimal, (relatively speaking) but we were caught—my fellow exiles and I—in a violent current of air which whirled us about continually, and because of Bernoulli's principle, or something of the like, made it terribly difficult to get back inside even when we were at the very edge of the hole. Furthermore, the light from inside was absolutely blinding. Do not forget that our eyes were accustomed to utter darkness.

But even in the face of all these difficulties we had managed to organize ourselves and took turns in holding onto the shell at the edge of the hole. There was room for only one to hold on at a time and all the others were linked in a chain to his legs. It was absolutely imperative that the one holding on do so firmly or else we should all be whirled about in darkness for another thousand centuries or however long it might take to find the hole again.

My turn at the hole had come and for some reason I'd chosen to hold on with my teeth. This was extremely painful, but made bearable by the knowledge that I soon would be relieved by my next in line. Then to my horror I heard the others laughing among themselves and suddenly realized that they were not going to relieve me, that they were quite prepared to leave me holding on forever.

So infuriated was I, that I momentarily thought of letting go in revenge and sending the entire traitorous pack of them whirling eternally. But that would have been cutting off my nose, so to speak, in that it would have doomed me to darkness as well.

Then all at once I had a vague, vague memory. It was less than a memory. It was a memory of a memory. This, or something very like had happened once before, and I was guilty, of some tremendous and unforgivable sin. I don't know what it was to this day. Perhaps I'd let go last time, or even worse kicked them loose and tried to crawl through by myself. In any case I began to realize there was some justice to

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my punishment, when all once at the dentist was snapping his fingers beneath my nose and leading me to another room. But as I sat in this other room I was by no means certain that the dream had ended. Indeed will it sound too fantastic if I say I'm still not certain now? Which is what I meant when the woman in the Grecian gown took me by the arm. It was too appropriate an action on her part and I thought its origin might have been inside myself.

"Are you a vision?" I asked her. "Or have I finally come upon a woman capable of reading my mind?"

She said nothing, not did she look at me as I spoke. I'd been speaking into the curtain of hair that covered her face. This seemed symbolical to me. I shall tell you why. It will have crossed your notice that some couples look into one another's eyes as they make love, whereas other couples cannot bear to look into one another's eyes. I have never been able to decide which is the more intimate action. However, I now began to feel that I had exposed my soul too quickly for her comfort and that Adam and Eve had covered themselves, not out of personal shame, but each out of consideration for the other.

In the next moment she stopped walking and gazed into my eyes. She gazed into my eyes for the space of a minute together and seemed to be reading my soul there and weighing it in a balance.

I was in a frightful state of tension for I couldn't see the reactions of her face. The night was extremely dark and her great veil of hair obscured her features from me, and further, I was nervous lest my soul be found wanting in weight. Another minute passed. Then she inclined her head forward and kissed me on the tip of my nose.

Do you know the story of the Chinese student who appeared for examination and was told to write everything he knew? That was what I did.

"I just saw a man drop dead in an art gallery and concluded that all flesh was grass. Now I see my mistake. Pain is the father of pleasure; suffering the mother of joy."

I lost all sense of measure. It was like Niagara Falls. And the

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more excited I grew the louder grew my voice. Lucky the street was deserted!

"I thought I should have to construct my beautiful goddess, but there I have found you intact."

She didn't answer. I fancied she was being tactful for I knew I'd gone overboard. But no wonder. My mural—let me confess it—the universe itself had taken on an entirely different meaning. Gone was the despair. The pit was gone as well.

"Damn all tragedy," I cried, "and all the tragic colors. Life is kind! The world is good! I shall use lapis lazuli and gold!"

We were standing in my room by this time. My lust was transformed into adulation and I was all but on my knees. She turned her back whenever I spoke or else I would have been.

"Don't turn away," I said. "You are womanhood itself." But she put her fingers over my lips and continued to hide her face from myself and from the light.

"I'm sorry if I talk too much," I said, "But I've waited all my life." Again she put her fingers over my lips and I could not understand it.

"Have you taken vows of silence?" I asked. This time when she raised her hand I grasped her wrist and kissed her fingers one by one.

She struggled free and turned away.

"That's what it is," I cried. "You've sworn yourself to silence until you find an honest man."

Here my heart swelled inside my chest and crushed my lungs so that I couldn't breathe. My eyes filled with tears and when they cleared I found that she'd stripped off her Grecian gown and was standing naked. When she saw that I was looking at her she began making certain unspeakable gestures with her fingers. I couldn't believe it.

"What are you trying to tell me?" I asked her.

She made a grisly grunting sound deep inside her throat and repeated the gestures again.

I couldn't fathom what she meant.

Again and louder she grunted and her gestures grew more obscene than ever.

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"You're trying to tempt me," I said, "You're putting me to a test."

I was about to beg her not to because my faith was weak but she made a furious face and her chin sank down into her neck and she opened her mouth wide and black in a pantomine of a scream all the more revolting for its silence.

I snatched up a pad of paper to write what I wanted to say but she tore it from my hand and bit at it with her teeth until she'd turned it into confetti. Then she snatched my pencil and broke it into pieces.

When she'd done with her destruction she began smiling at me again and issuing her invitations anew. Her smile was more terrible then her wrath for I kept staring at her upper lip which seemed abnormally and disgustingly short. At first I fancied it was underdeveloped through lack of exercise that comes with the power of speech. But soon I realized that that was not the case. The case was that the rest of her face was overdeveloped from having to caricature each emotion as in a silent film.

Somehow we (or is it only myself?) expect the blind, the mute, the deaf, the halt, the lame to be more graceful and more sensitive than the general. It's logical. They have fewer senses or limbs and are therefore capable of devoting more time and energy to each. Take for example a person who is not only blind, deaf, dumb and devoid of the senses of taste and smell, but who is also missing three of his limbs. He is left with one leg and even on that leg four of the toes have been amputated.

What of the remaining toe?

Is it illogical to believe that this toe is the most sensitive, the most talented, the most graceful digit in all the world? I maintain that it is not in the least illogical. The reverse. We are quite justified in presuming that toe to be a positive miracle of nature capable of performing an unlimited number of wonders. And also justified in feeling vastly disappointed on finding that such is not the case.

Now perhaps you have in your own life done some abomination which makes your very toe-nails curl with

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revulsion when you think of it even ten years after the event. I do not ask you to think of the event itself. Only of your motives beforehand.

If it was innocence or passion, then you are lucky. You do not feel so bad. I will go further. You ought to mark the anniversary of the occasion with candles and blessings.

If your motive came from your mind, however, then rue the day. You have done an inexpiable sin, my friend, and your brain has been polluted beyond all power of resanctification to redeem it. The temple has been indelibly besmirched and your every thought and action is from thenceforth sullied.

It would be easy enough to describe the filthy business in full detail but I do not want to disgust you. Permit me instead to speak in the following parable.

The most beautiful princess of all was born one day—the flower of every virtue. Her hair, of course, was golden, her eyes emerald green, her flesh as white as milk or new fallen snow, all of which was not in itself a cause of great surprise, but only in the exceeding perfection, because even for the most beautiful princess there ever was she was still a stunning example.

As was the custom, all the great kings and all the small gathered their gifts and temptations together and awaited their turn at blandishment; the greatest last, the smallest first, as was also the custom, for the smaller seducers (always unsuccessful) were the sauce to the great king's feast.

The king of every virtue and of every tempting vice, the king of every precious metal and every precious stone, the king of joy and the king of sorrow, the king of pride and the king of pomp, the king of peace and the king of terror, the king of faith and the king of humility all waited in breathless exaltation as the first of the seducers approached the most beautiful princess.

Now the first of the seducers was the king of peddlers, lord over the smallest most worthless kingdom of all—who never had met with the slightest success for he was ugly and evil smelling, with the head of a beetle and the body of a grub, and carried the odor of dankest and vilest swamps wherever he

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crawled. As he wriggled toward the most beautiful princess and offered up his worthless bit of glass with one pustulating and chancrous arm, the other kings found it so inconceivable that it seemed comic rather than disgusting.

However, the features of the most beautiful princess were suddenly distorted into an expression of imbecile delight and she descended from her throne eagerly, snatched the bit of worthless glass from the king of peddlers and they were soon fornicating vulgarly with her buttocks in the mud.

Then the other kings saw that she was not really a princess at all, but a corrupt and outright slut and they fell upon her with cries of rage and disappointment. They rent her limb from limb, then went home weeping bitterly and never believed in any other princess again.

I have every respect for your intelligence and perspicacity. I would gladly agree that you are subtle beyond measure of the most delicate instruments yet devised. I am at your feet in fact. It is beyond my power to deceive you. Therefore do not fall into any error. Do not say; "The narrator is obviously a sensitive chap and like all sensitive chaps bewildered. He tells us one thing but clearly means another. He did it out of pity for the deafness of the girl. After all, isn't communication everything?" All this is false. I did it for the corruption of it alone.

Afterwards I gave her all my money and made signs to let her know she could take anything else she liked including my paint brushes and my paints for I'd already made and sealed my decision. She lingered interminably, incidentally, and the gas fire was on all the while, but when I finally got her out I turned the gas fire off, disconnected the hose from the portable stove and fixed it so that it would lead into the storage tunnel. Then I turned on the gas again, lit a candle, entered the storage tunnel and shut the door behind me.

Your narrator is not the sort of fellow to sit back patiently and wait for death, to receive it like some honored guest. That is why your narrator should hate to slash his wrists, then sit about for however long it takes one's blood to drip out into a bathtub or into a basin. And despite the many excellent

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reports one hears of carbon monoxide, your narrator for one opposes it on similar grounds. Your narrator is the sort who attacks death, who goes out to meet it, or even better yet, the sort who pursues it. These distinctions puzzle you. But that is because you have not thought of suicide as an act of self-preservation. And do not be offended that I can read your mind. The pelican of the wilderness is given to know many hidden things.

Illuminating gas flowing into a confined space in the presence of an open flame will sooner or later be ignited and the ensuing explosion should be of sufficient force to kill anyone within that space. But would you believe it? I waited for over fifteen minutes and nothing happened. After I had waited for over fifteen minutes I suddenly remarked that I could not smell the odor of gas. (English illuminating gas still has a characteristic odor. Not so in America where commercial delicacy has progressed to such a degree that one is now permitted to deceive oneself right up to the very lip of the grave.)

I could not understand what had gone amiss. Had I forgot to turn the gas on? It gave me pain even to suspect this might be true, for insincerity in a suicide is quite the most revolting hypocrisy of all. I rushed outside and was relieved to find the cock was properly open. But what was it then? Had the thing gone out of whack? I checked the connections and all the connections seemed correct.

Suddenly a terrible convulsion shot through me and I dropped to my knees like one struck on the head with a hammer. I was stunned as an ox at slaughter and could not even manage to breathe. I shook and trembled and shuddered like a leaf. I have no notion how long this state of shock endured. It could have been a fraction of a second or the better part of an hour. But throughout that entire monstrous moment I was convinced that there actually was a God and that He had chosen that moment to prove His existence to me.

In the next moment I thought to check the meter. It was there that the trouble lay. It needed another shilling piece. I

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snatched at my pockets but then recalled I'd given the deaf girl all my money. I lunged for the desk but not a penny to be found. I went over the floor inch by inch. I ransacked the entire room. But not so much as a copper in the place.

I went out into the hall and knocked at Mrs. Baxter's door. "Mrs. Baxter, may I speak to you a moment?"

"Baxter isn't here," Her son's voice. "Baxter's gone to the pictures." His voice was exactly like her voice. I suddenly understood he was satirizing his mother.

"Look," I said, "My meter has run out."

"Sorry," he said in a gleeful tone. "Baxter does the meters.'

"There's nothing wrong with the meter. I just don't have a shilling."

"No." He giggled triumphantly. "Baxter's got the shillings."

"That's right, Mr. Baxter," I said, "And she keeps them in a brown cloth bag. I wonder if you know where it's hidden."

"It isn't hidden," he said. "It's right here on the table."

I grew excited. "Mr. Baxter," I said, "you are in a position to do me a favor for which I shall be eternally grateful."

"Oh no," he said. "*I'm* not to touch the bag."

He said this firmly but I detected a note of resentment in his tone and tried to play upon it. "Your mother told you not to touch it, didn't she, Mr. Baxter? Lest you make a mistake, But you won't make a mistake, Mr. Baxter."

"I'm not to touch the bag," he said.

"Maybe your mother knows that on the day you touch that bag you'll be just as wise as she is, Mr. Baxter."

"Oh no. I'm not to touch the bag. And besides," he said, no longer imitating his mother's voice, "My name isn't Mr. Baxter."

"That's beside the point," I cried.

"It may be beside the point to you," he said, "But it's not beside the point to me. Mr. Baxter was my mother's second husband."

Here I lost control and began pounding on the door.

"Sorry," he said. "I do the switchboard, Baxter does the meters."

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"Don't try to tell me that," I cried. "You answer the doorbell too. Don't deny it because I've seen you." The point was that sometimes his mother answered the doorbell as well, which meant that the labor was not divided as strictly as he would have me believe. But it was futile. Maniacs are immune to logic. I took a completely different tack.

"If my memory serves me sir," I said in the calmest tone conceivable, "you were quite elated when I came to rent my room. In fact you were so elated that you raced up four flights of stairs, one step at a time, *screaming like a friend*," I shouted through the door.

"That was Mr. Baxter's room," he said, "He was my mother's second husband."

"No matter whose room it was, why were you so elated?"

"Basement rooms are always difficult to rent," he answered smugly.

"If ordinary basement rooms are difficult to rent," I asked him, "What about basement rooms in which the last occupant has hanged himself by the neck?"

No answer.

"Let us strike a bargain shall we?" I suggested. "Why don't you just give me a shilling like a good fellow, no matter whose business it is to touch or not to touch the bag? We'll call it a little insurance premium on the reputation of the house. After all, explosions are always accidental.People will blame it on the gas company. But just between you and I my friend, who has ever heard of an accidental hanging?"

But the fantastic fellow only giggled with greater delight than ever. "Oh," he said, "Baxter does the hangings."

I was thunder-struck.

"Baxter does the meters and the hangings," he said.

I backed away from the door in terror.

"Besides," he said, "People who rent basement rooms are never very particular. Most don't even ask."

Have you ever been to the bottom of the sea? And I don't mean in a bathysphere, or in swimming flippers and an underwater rubber suit. No, I mean in your bare flesh and not for pleasure either. Just to the bottom of the sea with your

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feet in the slime, and where the water is dank, lightless and primevally murky and cold.

Now imagine that while at the bottom of the sea you suddenly perceive a cello standing upright with nothing to play upon it but the currents of the sea itself and that by some miracle you are able to hear the music it plays. It is always the same three notes gravissimo.

"Muss es *sein*?"

My question is, what would your answer be?

"Es *muss* sein!" you say. You shout it out. "Absolutely. Beethoven was right. Es muss sein and es muss sein again! The worse it is the better it is." You pound your fist upon the arm of your comfortable chair.

I agree. I agree completely and admire your spirit too. And I know it doesn't make a bit of difference that your fat buttocks are planted in the center of your comfortable chair and that you are not at the bottom of the sea with your feet in the slime, and where the water is dank, lightless and primevally murky and cold.

No, my friend, do not believe me. It is written on your wall in letters six feet high. DESPAIR, DESPAIR, DEADLIEST OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS. Don't stop to call any Daniels. Flee it! Flee it as you would flee the wicked city and don't look back...

Though perhaps your courage may avail you. Aye, Boldman hang on by the noble ends of your noble fingernails and hope that the fibre of your fingernails will endure. I shall teach you seventy-seven kinds of solitaire to play. Each is guaranteed to brake the brain when thought grows too unbearable. When these fail, and they will, there is a list of psalms to sing in the darkness.

Don't you see that it's hopeless? Climb Mount Everest. Swim the English Channel. Such deeds are far easier, appear much harder and the rewards are infinitely greater for the whole point is that your courage will not avail you, I don't care how much you have. Your grains of doubt will be magnified into mountains and the very thing you're hanging onto will be swept away.

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On the other hand it might be that each day's victory gives one an extra bit of resolution for next day's battle and so on until somehow one finally hardens into a scar.

Or are you the sort who cannot find salvation in a metaphor?

Then console yourself with this. True magnificence comes in hanging on even in the face of inevitable disaster. Especially when it's pointless. For the more hopeless everything is the quicker one's eventual transfiguration, the more brilliant one's beatitude.

In the meantime, buck up and hang on one more day no matter how you feel. That it's unlikely I grant you. Farfetched as well. Indeed it is even inconceivable. But one can really never tell, can one? It could just be that tomorrow afternoon at half-past five o'clock all men will suddenly become brothers. A few minutes later God might even come. He is able to leap many light years in a single bound. And admit it. After all this you would feel a colossal ass for missing that.

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PASSAGES FROM THE ODES OF PINDAR

O transients on earth, what is man?
what not? The shadow cast
by a dream. But one whom the gods give
glory shines with a radiant
light, and life grows sweet and beloved

Other in kind
are gods and men, yet both quicken through one
mother. All their intrinsic dif-
ference in being holds them apart,
so that a man is adrift, while the gods
have their serene and eternal abode
in the sonorous heavens. And still,
somehow we come close to immortals, whether
in greatness of spirit or
bodily beauty, although
never by day or by night do we
know against what
barriers Fate has decreed that we toil.

For marvels are many and
told in the tongue of man
that flashes beyond what exists, myths are made
whose color and fancy have seized on the vig-
or to simulate truth.
The poem, though, carrier of all which ac-
cords delight to man, adds weight.
Instinct with power it
conjures belief in the hard-to-believe.
But the days to come will
act as ultimate judges.

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It is true, O my heart, that an age is appoin-
ted to gather in love.
And yet one who sees the light
leap in the golden eyes of Theoxenus and is
not shaken with longing, must be black at the core, his
heart hammered of steel or
iron forged fast by a cold
flame. Aphrodite, the long-
lidded, marks him out for dishonor, so that he
either must join the hue and
cry after gains, or cater to women's impu-
dent grossness all the frozen length of his days.
As for me, through her grace, I
melt like the wax of the hallowed bees
under the siege of the sun, whenever I see
boys with their young, smooth limbs...

..... Age-old forces convey
strength to the generations of man
in rhythmic recurrence. Not
always predictably will the rich, black
furrow bring fruit to the field, and
trees do not urge into like pro-
fusion of sweet-smelling blos-
soms year after year, but only in given round.
And in the same reiterant cycle
Destiny drives what is mortal.
Zeus does not render to man a clear
sign to companion his ways.
Yet we go our course with exul-
tant belief in ourselves,
hot in pursuit of a bevy of goals,
for our limbs are tethered to
impudent hope, and the streams of di-
vining flow far from our ken.
But measure shall be a curb in the hunt for joy, though the
more
out of reach what we love, the more frantic desire.

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For they are bathed in the
clearest beams, while below
darkness has clouded the earth, they
move over meadows inlaid with
bright-colored bloom, where the balsam-
tree is the giver of shade and
golden boughs bend
burdened with fruit.
And some delight in horses and bod-
ily prowess, some in games with their
moves of chance and skill, while others
glory in song, and for these ful-
fillment comes into richest flower.

translated from the Greek by
OLGA MARX and RENATA V. SCHELIHA

SOURCES:

"O transients..." Pythia VIII
"For marvels are many..." Olympia I
"Age-old forces convey..." Nemea XI
"It is true..." fr. 123 (Encomium on Theoxenos)
"For they are bathed..." fr. 129-130 (Threnos)
"Other in kind..." Nemea VI
(The Pindar edition used was that of O. Schroeder, 1914.)

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ART CENTER

Glass
and wide seaview

Race that walks
from there
you are lovely

you have *seen*

—LORINE NIEDECKER

ALCOHOLIC DREAM

Alcoholic dream
that ran him
out from home
to return
leaning

like the house
in this old part
of town leaves him
grieving:
Why

do I hurt you
whom I love?
Your ear
is cold! – here,
drink.

—LORINE NIEDECKER

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YOU MUST SAY GOODBYE

> '*You must say goodbye, it would be madness*
> *not to say goodbye, when the time comes.*'
> Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*.

Now we are going mad not saying goodbye
in elmed Milwaukee evening, everyone here—
Aunt May and Margaret, and Tom John's limpid eye
twisting, and dripping on Willa's long blond hair
as she kisses the kitten and tosses it up in the air.

It is sticky and hot, a thundery midwest evening
Indians don't dance in now that Indians are rare.
Everyone said already they must be leaving
but still they stand or sit, aunt, cousin, sister
as if they waited for something that's not quite clear—

the sky to suddenly split, the lightning to print them
forever from negatives exactly as they are.
How can we say goodbye, how can we quit them
for days and weeks, for months, for more than a year
when even Aunt May avoids the choice of the door

moths want to flit through, the light is so inviting
and better than being out in the Indian dark?
The time has come, but the time is too exciting.
'Tom John, stop dying'—does Margaret seem to remark?—
as bloods of madness thud through the staying heart.

—HAROLD WITT

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

INTERVIEWS

William Fifield *(Interview with Jean Cocteau; Pablo Picasso)*, born in Chicago in 1916, was graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Whitman College. He has been a radio announcer and writer, and has traveled widely as a free-lance writer. His novels include *The Devil's Marchioness* (1957), *The Sign of Taurus* (1960), and *Matadora* (1961); he is co-author of *The Wines and Spirits of the World* (with Alexis Lichine); and his stories and articles have appeared in numerous publications. He is now at work on a Renaissance trilogy. Since 1950 he has lived in Paris.

Stanley Koehler *(Interview with William Carlos Williams)* teaches English at the University of Massachusetts. He is poetry editor of the *Massachusetts Review*, and co-author of a volume of verse entitled *A Curious Quire*.

FICTION

Stanley Elkin *(The Great Sandusky)*, born in New York in 1930, received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Illinois, and is now Assistant Professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis. His short stories have been published in *Esquire*, *Perspective*, *The Chicago Review*, and other magazines, and he has been represented twice in Martha Foley's *Best American Short Stories Annual*. *The Great Sandusky*, an excerpt from his first novel *Boswell*, is the winning story in the 1963 Paris Review Contest for the encouragement of humorous fiction, established by Gertrude Vanderbilt.

Herbert Lobsenz *(Pelican of the Wilderness)* was born in New York in 1932 and graduated from New York University in 1953. After two years with the Army in Europe, he continued his studies in England, Spain, and Italy. His first novel, *Vangel Griffin*, begun in Madrid in 1957, was the 1961 Harper Prize Novel.

POETRY

Larry Eigner *(Two Poems)* lives in Swampscott, Mass., where he was born in 1927. He has had two collections of his poems published, *From the Sustaining Air* and *On My Eyes*. Some of his more recent work (six poems) appeared in *Poetry* for January, 1964.

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Louis Zukofsky (Catullus 70, 72, 73) is translating the whole of Catullus with his wife Celia. He was born in 1904 on the Lower East Side, Manhattan, and now lives in Brooklyn. Of his fourteen published works the most recent are *I's (pronounced eyes)*, poems, and *Bottom: on Shakespeare*, volume 1, both of which appeared in 1963. Jargon-Corinth is scheduled to issue a paperback edition of *A Test of Poetry* in the fall, 1964.

Charles Olson (Two Sections from *Maximus*) was born in 1910 in Worcester, Mass. He now lives in Wyoming, New York and teaches at the State University of New York at Buffalo. His work can be found in *The Distances* (Grove Press) and *The Maximus Poems* (Jargon-Corinth), both published in 1960. The sections included here are extensions of his major work.

Lewis Meyers *(Going to Chicago)* was born in Washington, D.C., in 1934, and is currently studying and teaching at the University of Michigan, where he studied with Donald Hall. *Poetry Northwest, Hudson Review, Epos*, and other magazines have taken his work, and he has won awards for poetry and essay in the Hopwood writing competition.

Robert Bly *(Meditation on Olai and Pete Bly)* is the editor of *The Sixties*, a magazine of poetry. His first collection, *Silence in the Snowy Fields*, was recently published in the Wesleyan Poetry Series. He lives on a farm in Madison, Minnesota.

Theodore Holmes *(Tourist Cabins in Winter)* has taught at Harvard and has recently spent a year living and writing in England. *The Harvest and the Scythe*, his first collection, appeared in the Scribner's Poets of Today series.

Olga Marx (Passages from the Odes of Pindar) has a doctorate from Johns Hopkins and lives in New York. Her books of translations (in collaboration with Ernst Morwitz) are *Poems of Alcman, Sappho and Ibycus* and *The Works of Stefan George*. About the Pindar versions appearing here she writes: "The passages were selected from the viewpoint of offering poetry lifted from a framework of more specifically temporal allusions. The Greek rhythms have been imitated to give an idea of the flow of the original and the effect of contiguous stressed syllables..."

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Renata v. Scheliha (Passages from the Odes of Pindar) has a doctorate from the University of Breslau, and has published a translation into German of Longinus' *On the Sublime*. Her other books are *Dion* and *Patroclus*. She is now completing *A Study of the Musical and Poetical Contests of the Greeks*, and lives in New York.

Lorine Niedecker *(Three Poems)* lives in Milwaukee. Her book of poems, *My Friend Tree*, came out with the wild Hawthorn Press, Edinburgh, and has been translated into French by Nicole Rabetaud.

Harold Witt *(You Must Say Goodbye)*, author of *Beasts in Clothes*, has a new collection of poems ready to print, called *Lines from Inner Space*. Mr. Witt has published in *Merlin* and in *The Paris Review* N^os 12 & 15, and is currently contributing to *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, and *Hudson Review*. A verse play about Alcibiades, *Eros on the Shield*, was lately co-winner of a San Francisco Poetry Center competition.

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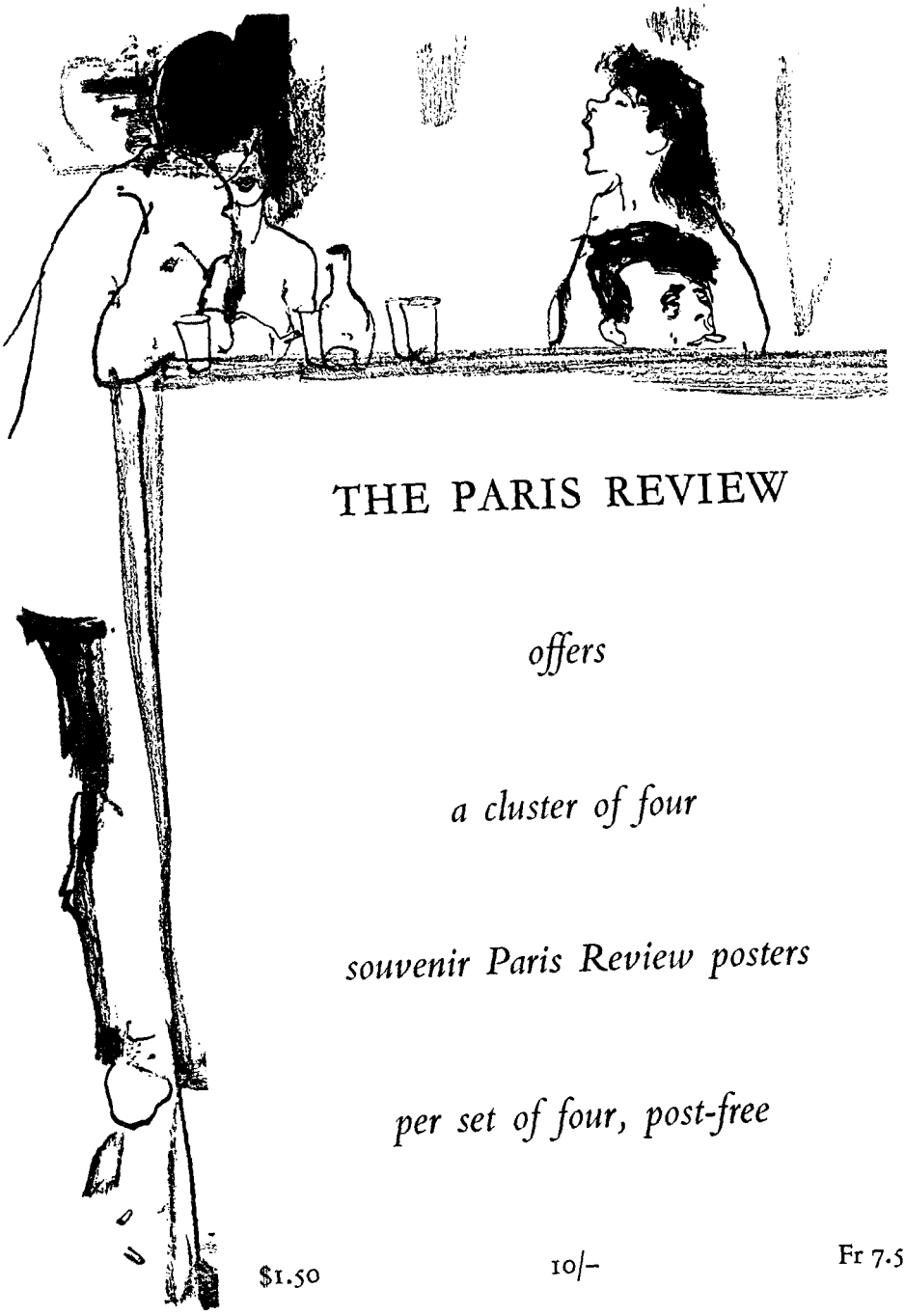

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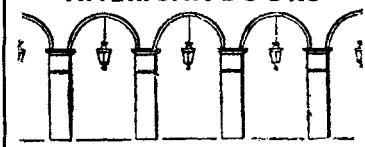

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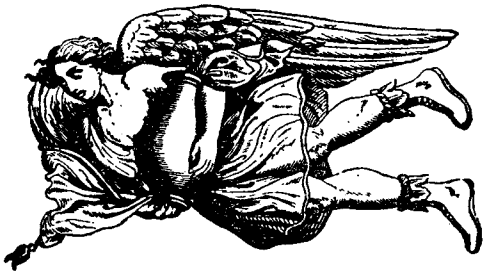

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EN dernier SCÈNE Edith Piaf

JEAN COCTEAU . . . Près

C'est dans la jardin de cette chapelle de Milly-la-Forêt, Saint-Blaise-les-Simples, qu'il avait décorée il y a trois ans, qu'il sera inhumé.

Jean Cocteau Dies Hours After Edith Piaf

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'Sparrow'

Sauf avis contraire d'André Malraux

Oui cher Jean nous ne retournerons

Poet, Rebel

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